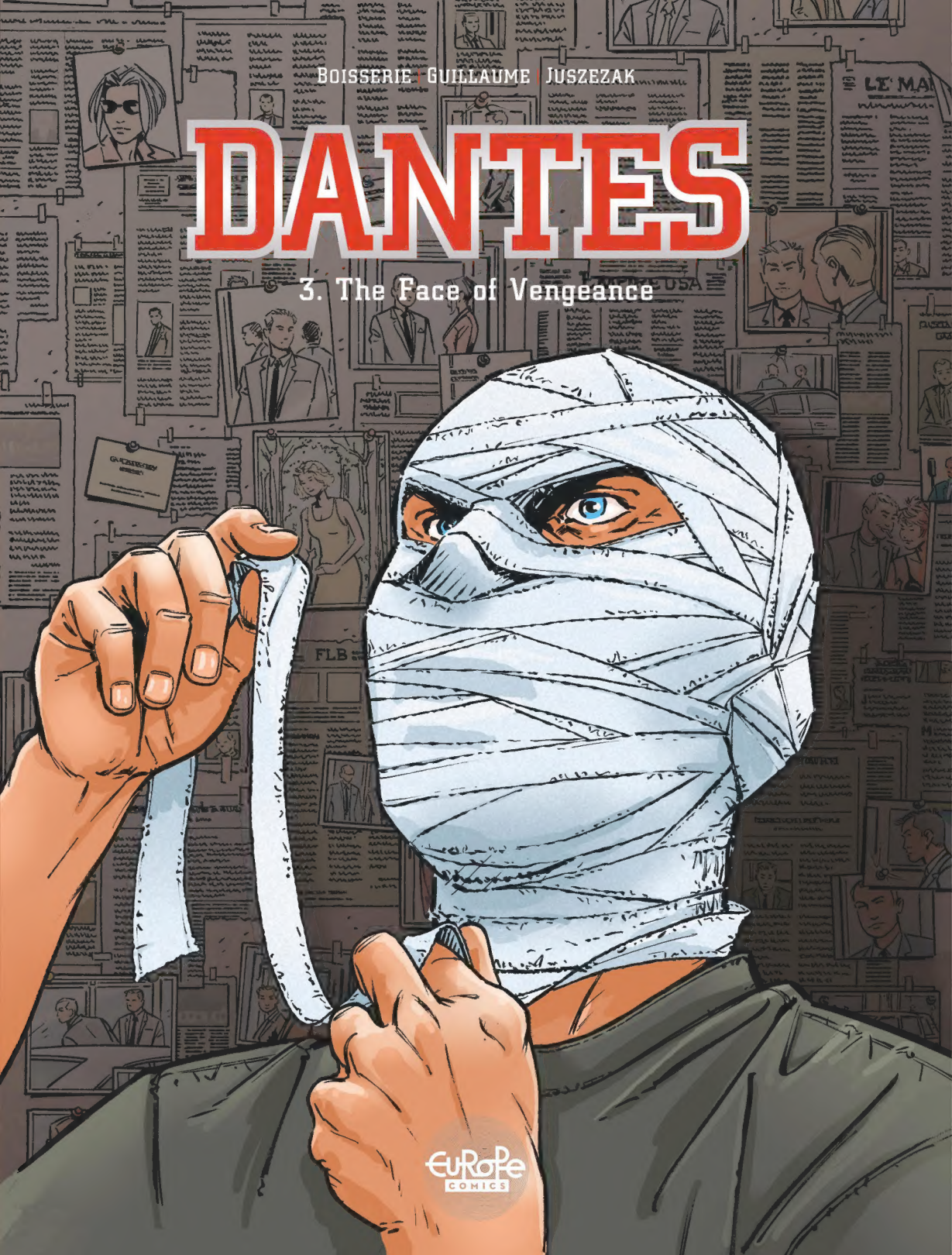

BOISSERIE | GUILLAUME | JUSZEZAK
DANTES
3. The Face of Vengeance
FLB
EUROPE COMICS

BOISSERIE | GUILLAUME | JUSZEZAK

DANTES

3. The Face of Vengeance

Writers
Pierre Boisserie
Philippe Guillaume

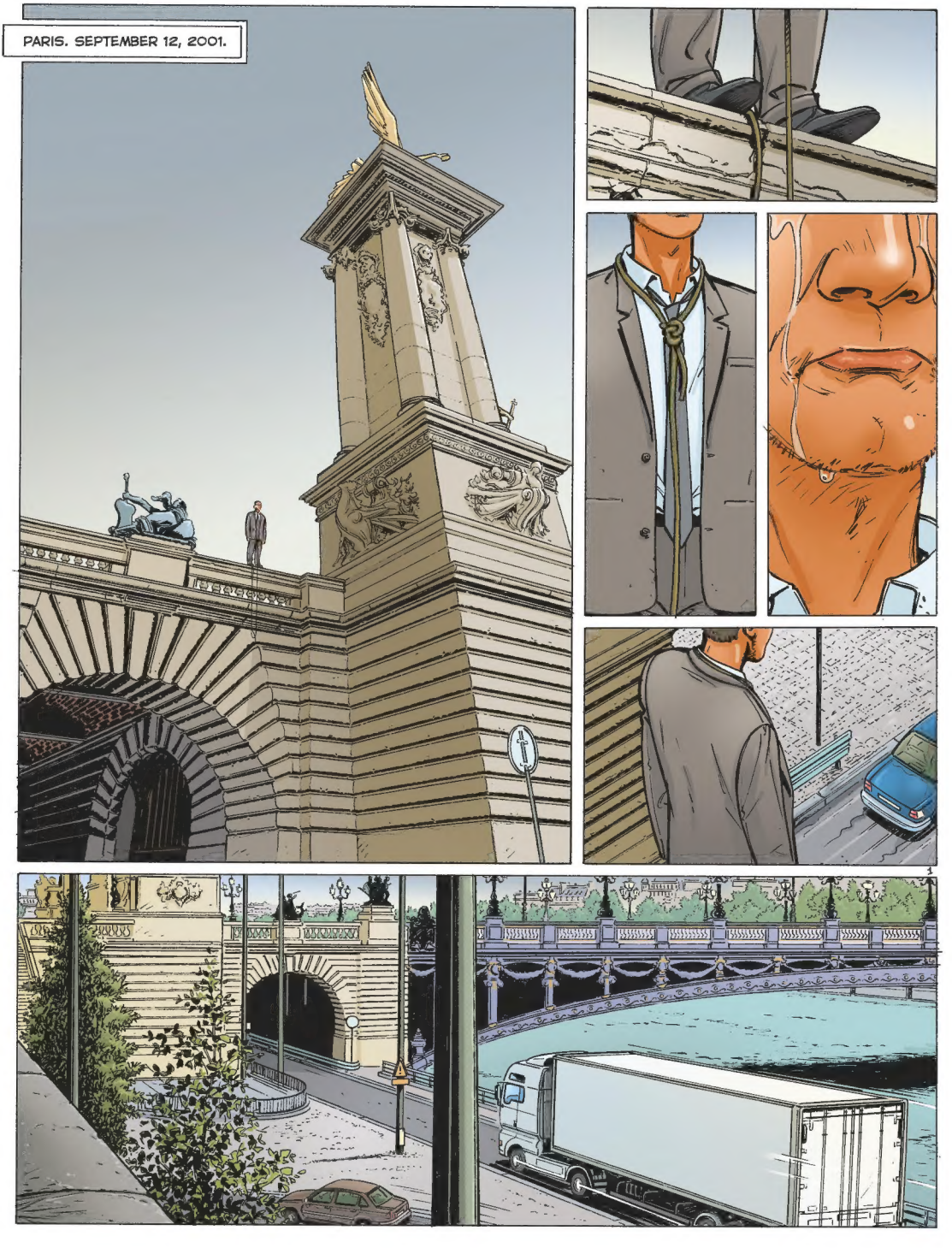
Artist
Erik Juszezak

Colorist
Juliette Nardin

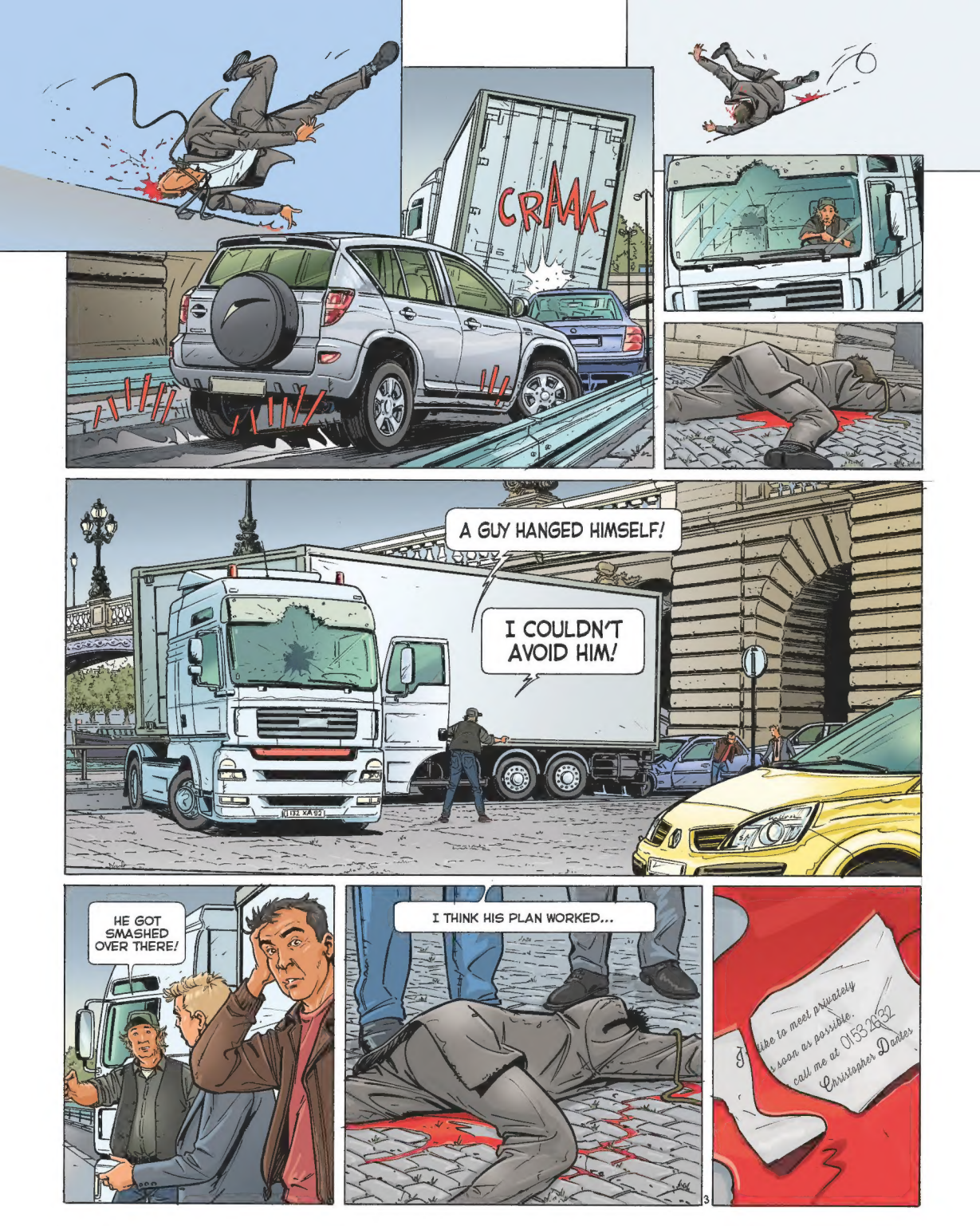
EUROPE COMICS

RECAP

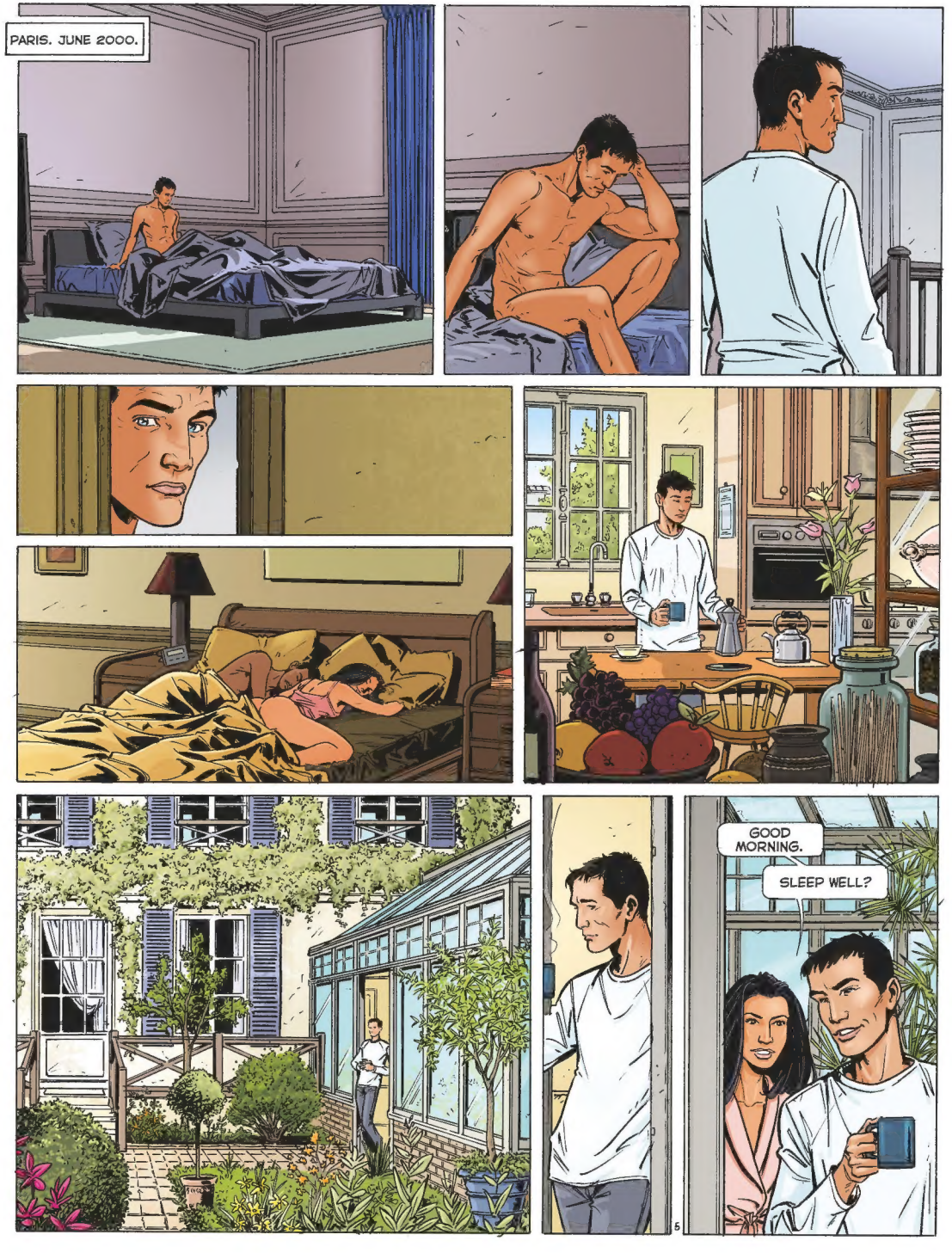
Alexandre, a young trader, finds himself caught up in the collapse of the BGCI... but it soon becomes apparent that he has been totally manipulated by his own superiors, among them Jean Saint-Hubert, the director of the bank. This Machiavellian plot also sees him blamed for the murder of Sancier, his boss at the BGCI and the only person to have realized that a major financial scheme was being woven. Convicted and imprisoned, he meets his cellmate Gabriel, a computer genius. Several years later, they organize a prison break, but Alexandre suffers a serious injury to his face and his fellow prisoner dies. Gabriel's daughter, Sarah, takes care of a disfigured Alexandre, who gives himself a new identity... Dantes.

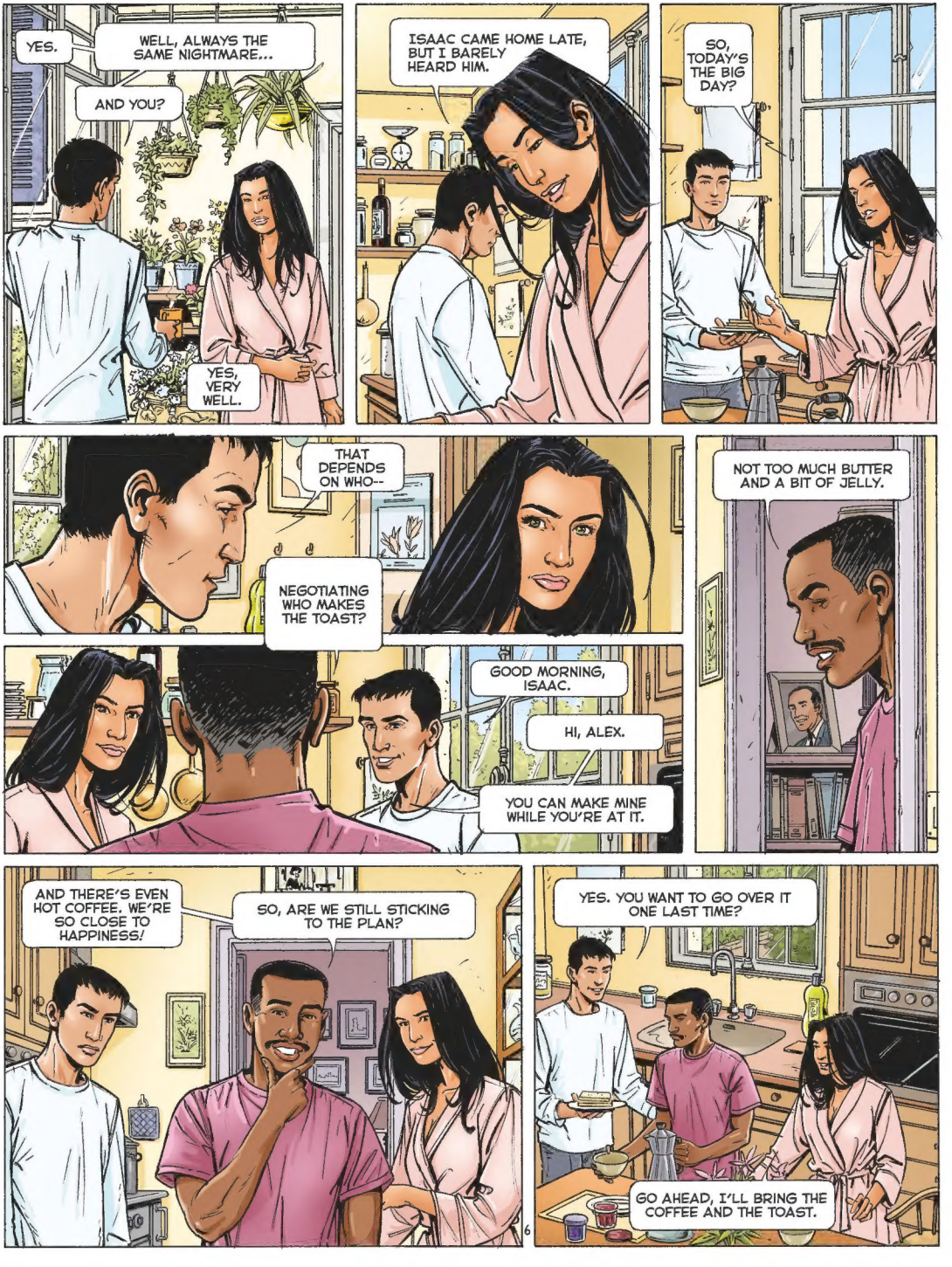

PARIS. SEPTEMBER 12, 2001.

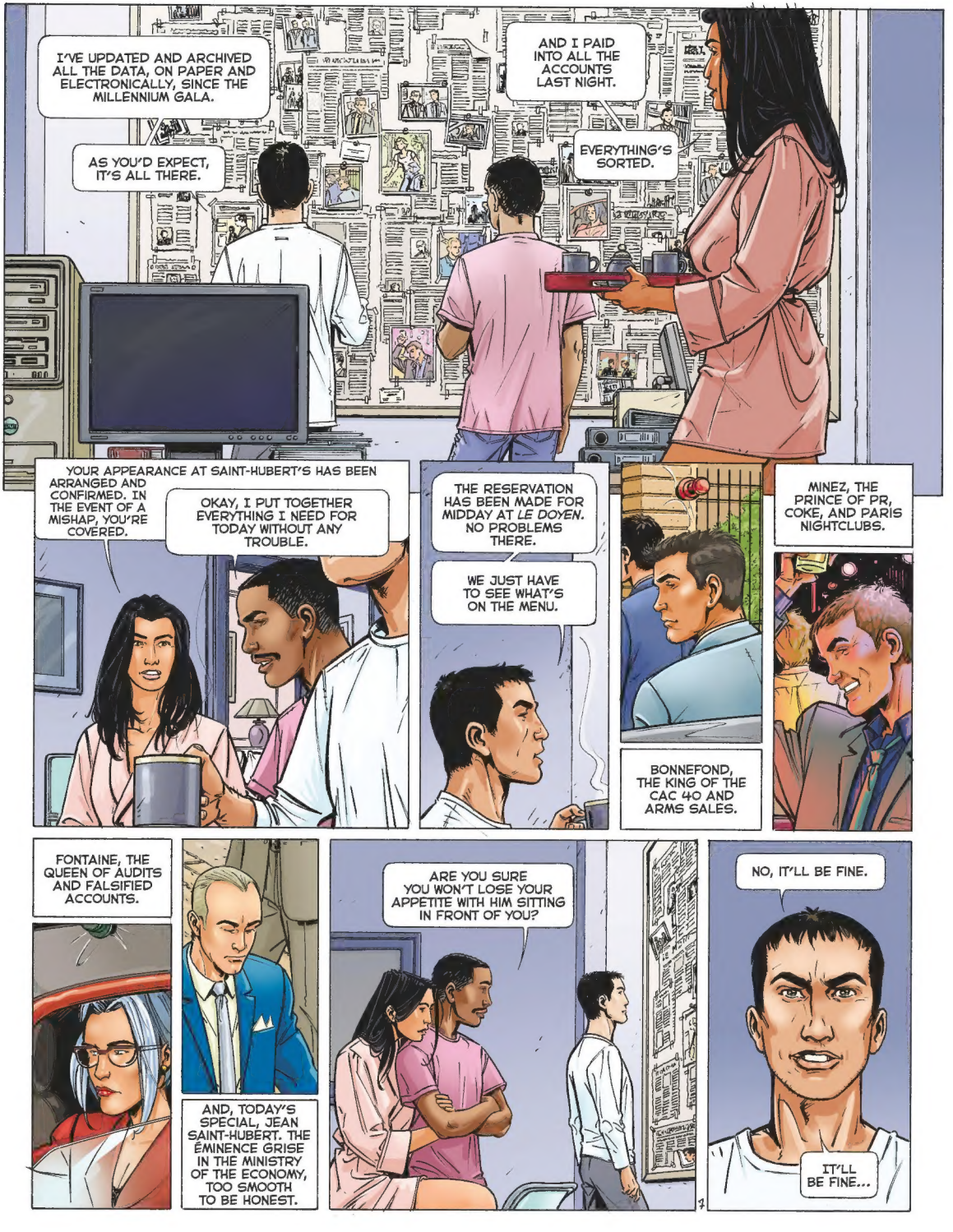
CRAK!
GOOD GOD!

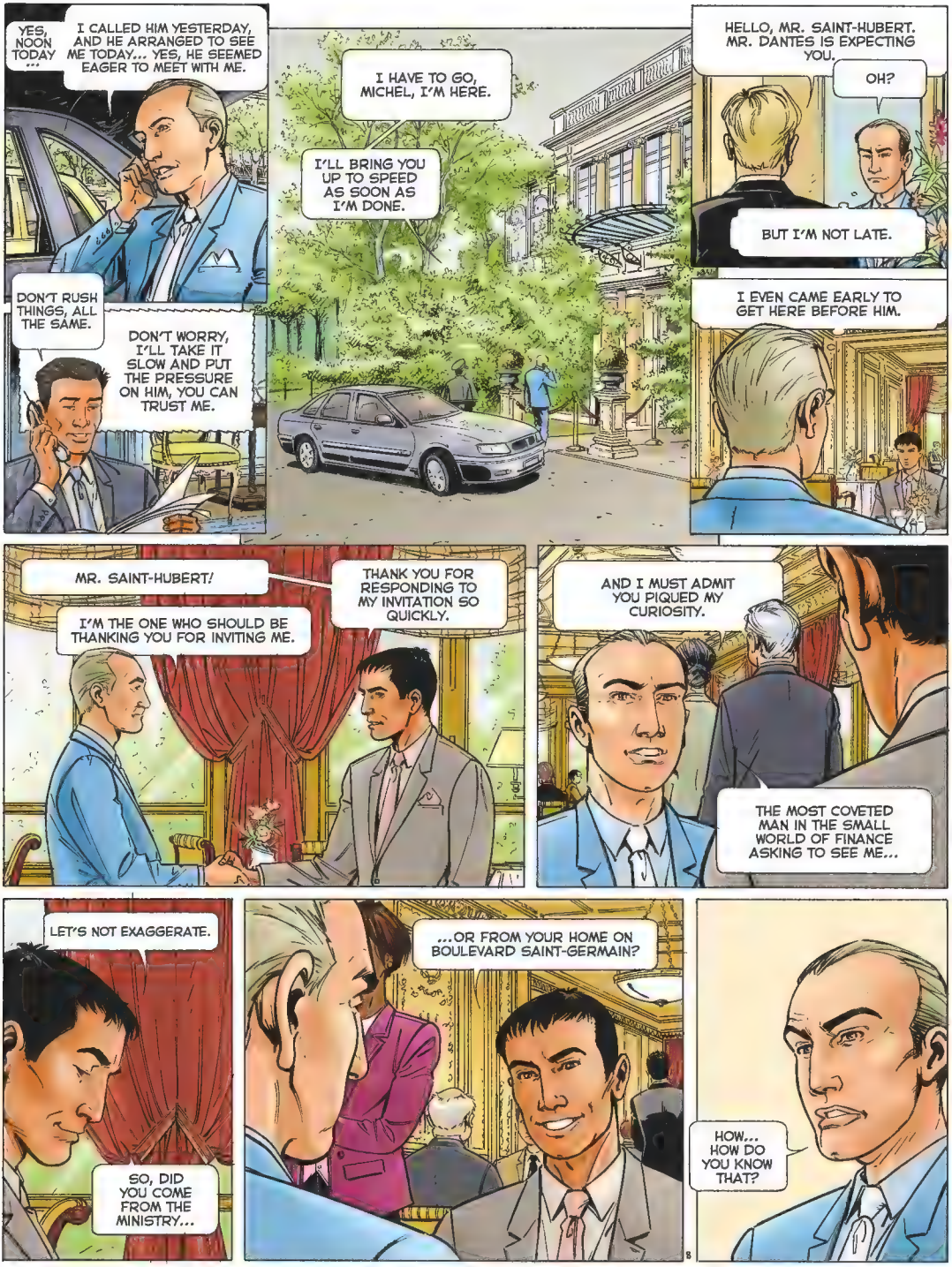

CRAAK
A GUY HANGED HIMSELF!
I COULDN'T AVOID HIM!
HE GOT SMASHED OVER THERE!
I THINK HIS PLAN WORKED...
like to meet privately
s soon as possible.
call me at 0153 2632
Christopher Davies

REVENGE!


PARIS. JUNE 2000.
GOOD MORNING.
SLEEP WELL?

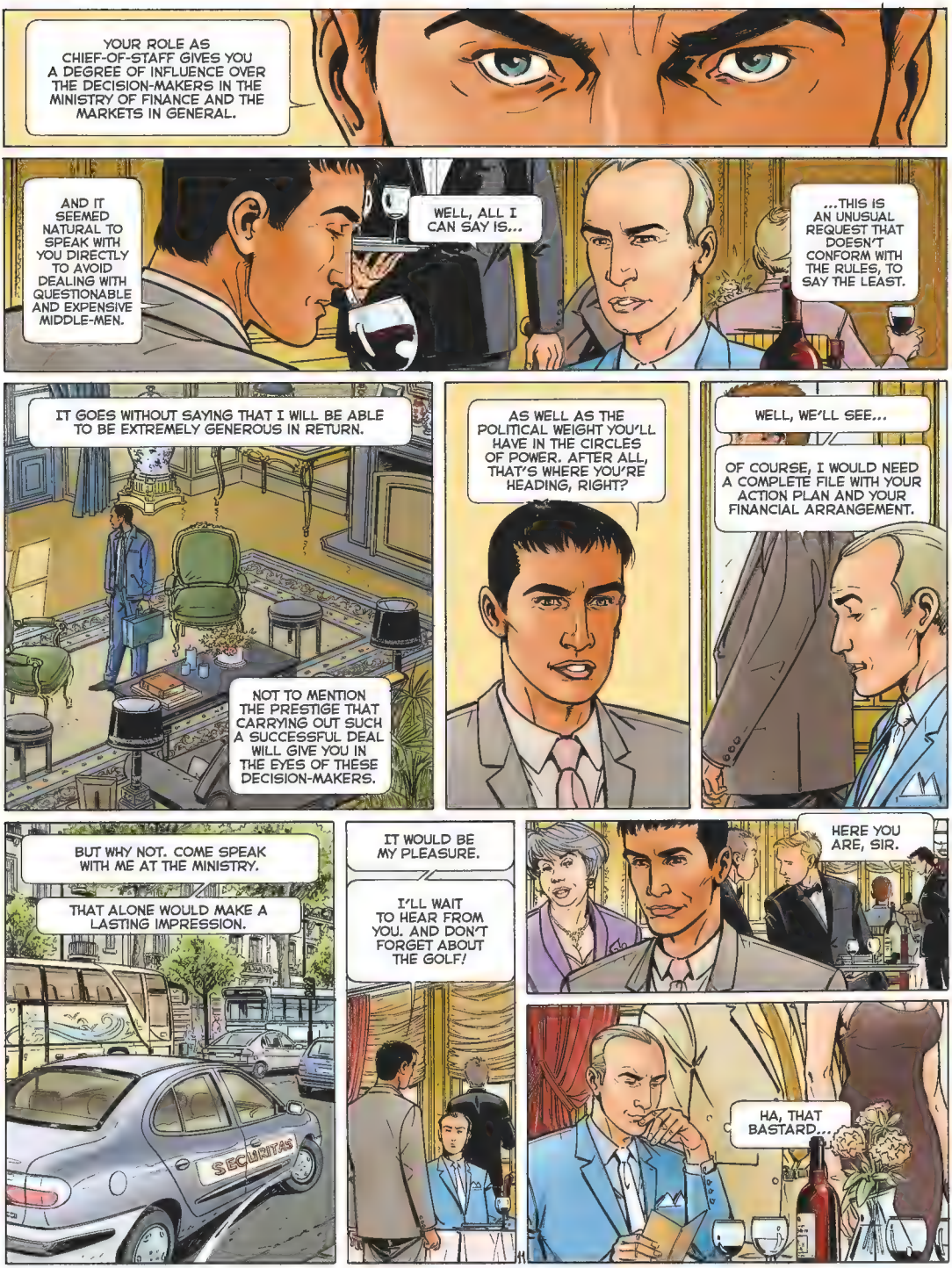

YES.
WELL, ALWAYS THE SAME NIGHTMARE...
AND YOU?
YES, VERY WELL.
ISAAC CAME HOME LATE, BUT I BARELY HEARD HIM.
SO, TODAY'S THE BIG DAY?
THAT DEPENDS ON WHO--
NEGOTIATING WHO MAKES THE TOAST?
NOT TOO MUCH BUTTER AND A BIT OF JELLY.
GOOD MORNING, ISAAC.
HI, ALEX.
YOU CAN MAKE MINE WHILE YOU'RE AT IT.
AND THERE'S EVEN HOT COFFEE. WE'RE SO CLOSE TO HAPPINESS!
SO, ARE WE STILL STICKING TO THE PLAN?
6
YES. YOU WANT TO GO OVER IT ONE LAST TIME?
GO AHEAD, I'LL BRING THE COFFEE AND THE TOAST.

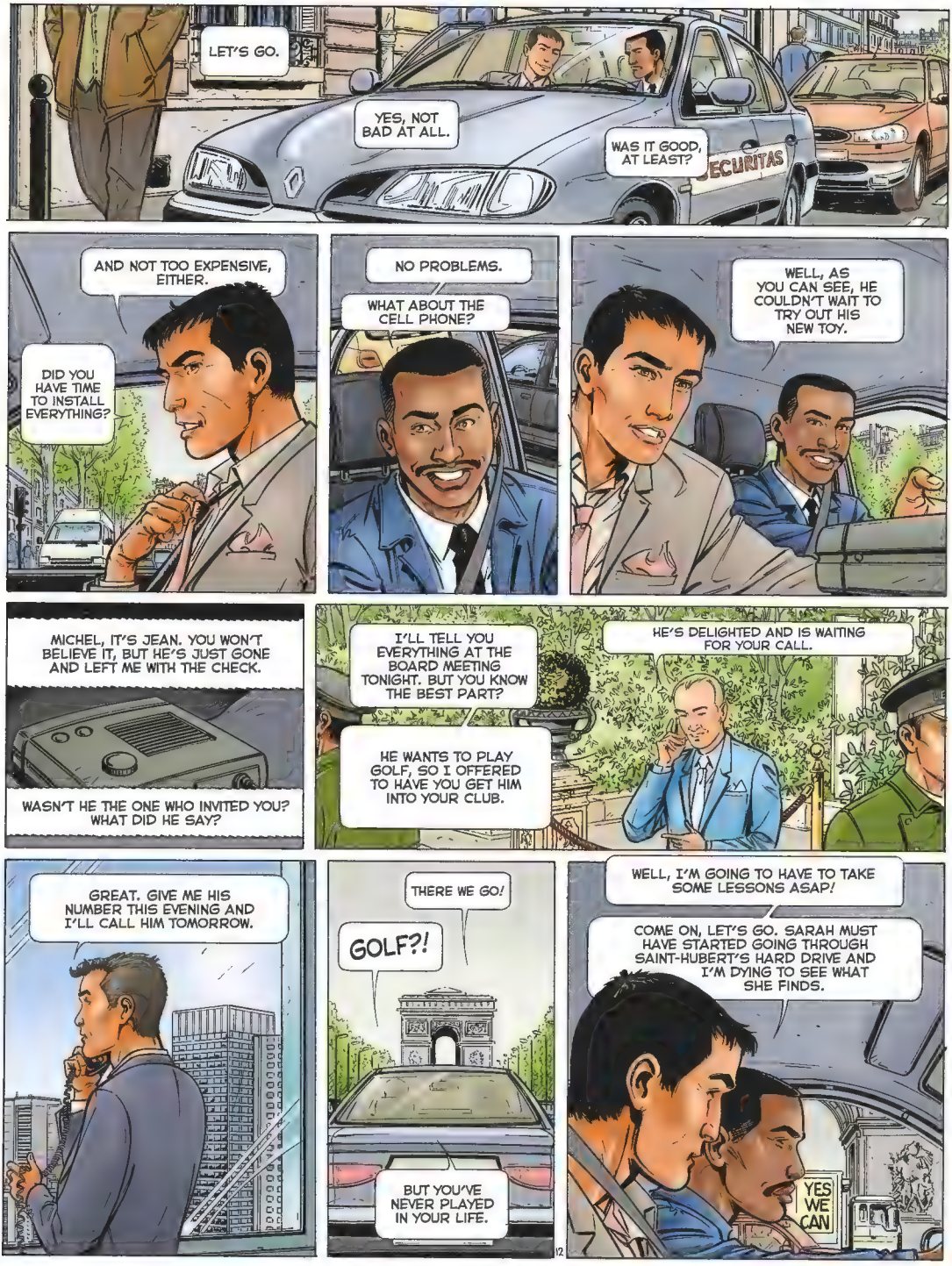

I'VE UPDATED AND ARCHIVED ALL THE DATA, ON PAPER AND ELECTRONICALLY, SINCE THE MILLENNIUM GALA.
AS YOU'D EXPECT, IT'S ALL THERE.
AND I PAID INTO ALL THE ACCOUNTS LAST NIGHT.
EVERYTHING'S SORTED.
YOUR APPEARANCE AT SAINT-HUBERT'S HAS BEEN ARRANGED AND CONFIRMED. IN THE EVENT OF A MISHAP, YOU'RE COVERED.
OKAY, I PUT TOGETHER EVERYTHING I NEED FOR TODAY WITHOUT ANY TROUBLE.
THE RESERVATION HAS BEEN MADE FOR MIDDAY AT *LE DOYEN*. NO PROBLEMS THERE.
WE JUST HAVE TO SEE WHAT'S ON THE MENU.
BONNEFOND, THE KING OF THE CAC 40 AND ARMS SALES.
MINEZ, THE PRINCE OF PR, COKE, AND PARIS NIGHTCLUBS.
FONTAINE, THE QUEEN OF AUDITS AND FALSIFIED ACCOUNTS.
AND, TODAY'S SPECIAL, JEAN SAINT-HUBERT. THE ÉMINENCE GRISE IN THE MINISTRY OF THE ECONOMY, TOO SMOOTH TO BE HONEST.
ARE YOU SURE YOU WON'T LOSE YOUR APPETITE WITH HIM SITTING IN FRONT OF YOU?
NO, IT'LL BE FINE.
IT'LL BE FINE...

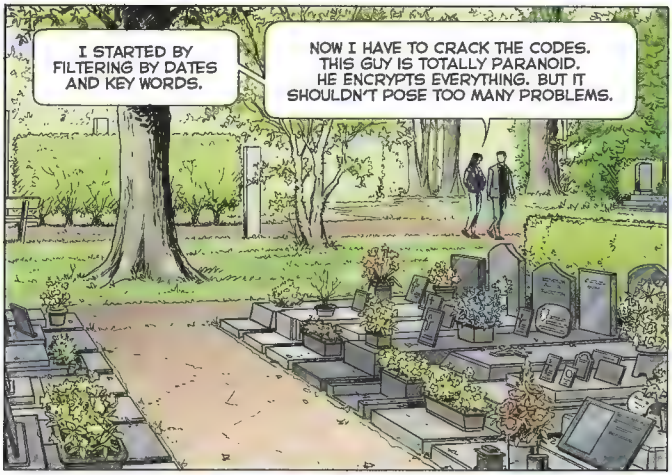

YES, NOON TODAY...
I CALLED HIM YESTERDAY, AND HE ARRANGED TO SEE ME TODAY... YES, HE SEEMED EAGER TO MEET WITH ME.
I HAVE TO GO, MICHEL, I'M HERE.
I'LL BRING YOU UP TO SPEED AS SOON AS I'M DONE.
HELLO, MR. SAINT-HUBERT. MR. DANTES IS EXPECTING YOU.
OH?
BUT I'M NOT LATE.
DON'T RUSH THINGS, ALL THE SAME.
DON'T WORRY, I'LL TAKE IT SLOW AND PUT THE PRESSURE ON HIM, YOU CAN TRUST ME.
I EVEN CAME EARLY TO GET HERE BEFORE HIM.
MR. SAINT-HUBERT!
I'M THE ONE WHO SHOULD BE THANKING YOU FOR INVITING ME.
THANK YOU FOR RESPONDING TO MY INVITATION SO QUICKLY.
AND I MUST ADMIT YOU PIQUED MY CURIOSITY.
THE MOST COVETED MAN IN THE SMALL WORLD OF FINANCE ASKING TO SEE ME...
LET'S NOT EXAGGERATE.
SO, DID YOU COME FROM THE MINISTRY...
...OR FROM YOUR HOME ON BOULEVARD SAINT-GERMAIN?
HOW... HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

LET'S JUST SAY I LIKE TO KNOW WHO I'M DOING BUSINESS WITH.
A WISE PRECAUTION INDEED.
BUT I DON'T KNOW THAT MUCH ABOUT YOU.
OH, BUT I HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE.
YOU CAN ASK ME ANYTHING YOU LIKE.
OKAY. THEN TELL ME EVERYTHING. THERE'S SO MUCH MYSTERY SURROUNDING YOUR PAST AND YOUR CAREER.
SECURIT'AS
IN A NUTSHELL, AS I DOUBT THE DETAILS WOULD BE OF INTEREST TO ANYONE, I'M FRENCH ON MY FATHER'S SIDE AND AMERICAN ON MY MOTHER'S.
I HAD A FIRST-RATE EDUCATION IN THE BEST SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES.
I MADE MY FORTUNE IN NEW MARKETS DURING THE SO-CALLED INTERNET BUBBLE. BUT I WAS ABLE TO GET OUT IN TIME BEFORE IT BURST.
SINCE THEN, AS YOU SURELY KNOW, I'VE REINVESTED MY PROFITS IN AS MANY DIFFERENT COMPANIES AS I CAN ENJOY RUNNING.
BUT I IMAGINE YOU ALREADY KNOW ALL THAT, DON'T YOU?
I AM WELL AWARE OF YOUR PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND THE VARIOUS CORPORATIONS YOU CONTROL...
...ALTHOUGH YOU NEVER COME OUT IN THE LIGHT OF DAY.
WHAT FOR?
A SECRET LIFE IS A HAPPY LIFE.
ON THAT NOTE...
...I WOULD LIKE TO PRESENT TO YOU MY NEWEST ACQUISITION.
9

IT'S A SWEDISH FIRM THAT DEVELOPS NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR CELL PHONES.
AND WE WOULD LIKE SOME HAND-PICKED CLIENTS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR NEW TOP-END MODEL.
HERE, THIS IS FOR YOU. YOU JUST HAVE TO INSERT YOUR SIM CARD.
WELL, THANK YOU. I'M HONORED. WE BARELY KNOW EACH OTHER.
IT'S MY PLEASURE, I ASSURE YOU. AND I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT WE WILL GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER MUCH BETTER VERY QUICKLY.
AND WHERE DO YOU LIVE?
MAINLY BETWEEN PARIS AND NEW YORK.
MY PARTNER, SARAH, WHOM YOU MET AT THE MILLENNIUM GALA, HAS HER BUSINESS THERE.
I ALSO HAVE A FEW PIED-À-TERRE HERE AND THERE. I'M VERY FOND OF DEAUVILLE AND BIARRITZ, FOR EXAMPLE.
I LIKE TO PLAY GOLF, BUT YOU'LL NEED TO LET ME KNOW IF THERE ARE ANY CLUBS NEARBY, AS I HAVEN'T JOINED ONE YET.
WHO DOESN'T PLAY GOLF NOWADAYS?! MY GOOD FRIEND MICHEL BONNEFOND, WHOM YOU KNOW, IS A FANATIC.
I COULD ALWAYS ASK HIM TO GET YOU INTO HIS CLUB.
I ASSURE YOU, IT'S A PRIVATE CLUB WHOSE MEMBERS ARE SELECTED WITH GREAT CARE.
GREAT!
YOU'VE MADE MY DAY!
JUST HAVE HIM CONTACT ME.
BUT I HARDLY THINK THAT YOU WANTED TO MEET ME JUST TO TALK ABOUT GOLF, RIGHT?
OF COURSE NOT. I'M IN THE MIDDLE OF SOME BUSINESS THAT REQUIRES THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT.

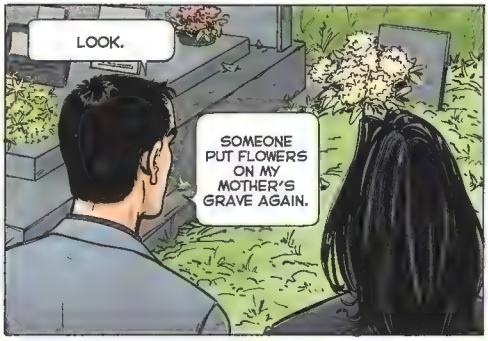

YOUR ROLE AS CHIEF-OF-STAFF GIVES YOU A DEGREE OF INFLUENCE OVER THE DECISION-MAKERS IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND THE MARKETS IN GENERAL.
AND IT SEEMED NATURAL TO SPEAK WITH YOU DIRECTLY TO AVOID DEALING WITH QUESTIONABLE AND EXPENSIVE MIDDLE-MEN.
WELL, ALL I CAN SAY IS...
...THIS IS AN UNUSUAL REQUEST THAT DOESN'T CONFORM WITH THE RULES, TO SAY THE LEAST.
IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT I WILL BE ABLE TO BE EXTREMELY GENEROUS IN RETURN.
NOT TO MENTION THE PRESTIGE THAT CARRYING OUT SUCH A SUCCESSFUL DEAL WILL GIVE YOU IN THE EYES OF THESE DECISION-MAKERS.
AS WELL AS THE POLITICAL WEIGHT YOU'LL HAVE IN THE CIRCLES OF POWER. AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE HEADING, RIGHT?
WELL, WE'LL SEE...
OF COURSE, I WOULD NEED A COMPLETE FILE WITH YOUR ACTION PLAN AND YOUR FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENT.
BUT WHY NOT. COME SPEAK WITH ME AT THE MINISTRY.
THAT ALONE WOULD MAKE A LASTING IMPRESSION.
SECURITAS
IT WOULD BE MY PLEASURE.
I'LL WAIT TO HEAR FROM YOU. AND DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE GOLF!
HERE YOU ARE, SIR.
HA, THAT BASTARD...

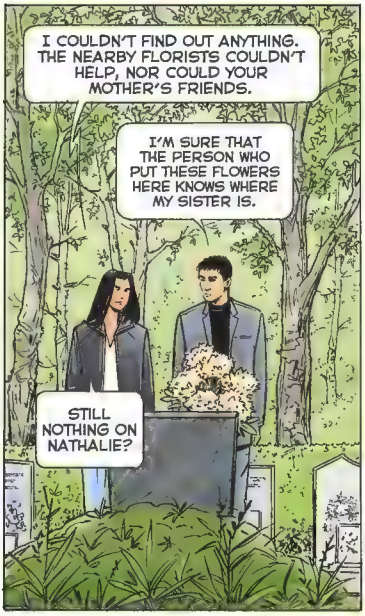

LET'S GO.
YES, NOT BAD AT ALL.
WAS IT GOOD, AT LEAST?
SECURITAS
AND NOT TOO EXPENSIVE, EITHER.
DID YOU HAVE TIME TO INSTALL EVERYTHING?
NO PROBLEMS.
WHAT ABOUT THE CELL PHONE?
WELL, AS YOU CAN SEE, HE COULDN'T WAIT TO TRY OUT HIS NEW TOY.
MICHEL, IT'S JEAN. YOU WON'T BELIEVE IT, BUT HE'S JUST GONE AND LEFT ME WITH THE CHECK.
WASN'T HE THE ONE WHO INVITED YOU? WHAT DID HE SAY?
I'LL TELL YOU EVERYTHING AT THE BOARD MEETING TONIGHT. BUT YOU KNOW THE BEST PART?
HE WANTS TO PLAY GOLF, SO I OFFERED TO HAVE YOU GET HIM INTO YOUR CLUB.
HE'S DELIGHTED AND IS WAITING FOR YOUR CALL.
GREAT. GIVE ME HIS NUMBER THIS EVENING AND I'LL CALL HIM TOMORROW.
THERE WE GO!
GOLF?!
BUT YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED IN YOUR LIFE.
WELL, I'M GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE SOME LESSONS ASAP!
COME ON, LET'S GO. SARAH MUST HAVE STARTED GOING THROUGH SAINT-HUBERT'S HARD DRIVE AND I'M DYING TO SEE WHAT SHE FINDS.
YES WE CAN
12

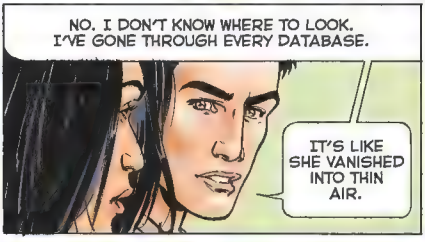

I STARTED BY FILTERING BY DATES AND KEY WORDS.
NOW I HAVE TO CRACK THE CODES. THIS GUY IS TOTALLY PARANOID. HE ENCRYPTS EVERYTHING. BUT IT SHOULDN'T POSE TOO MANY PROBLEMS.

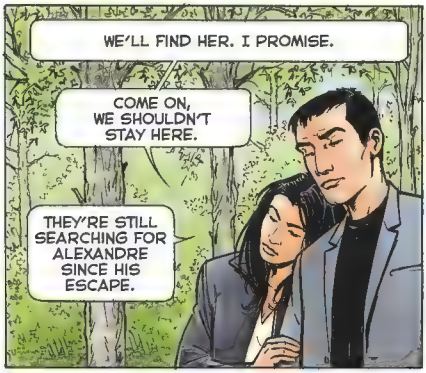
HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT WILL TAKE BEFORE THE DATA IS USABLE?

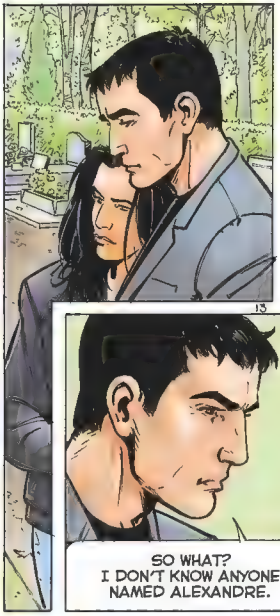
I'VE ONLY HAD IT TWO DAYS. GIVE ME SOME TIME.

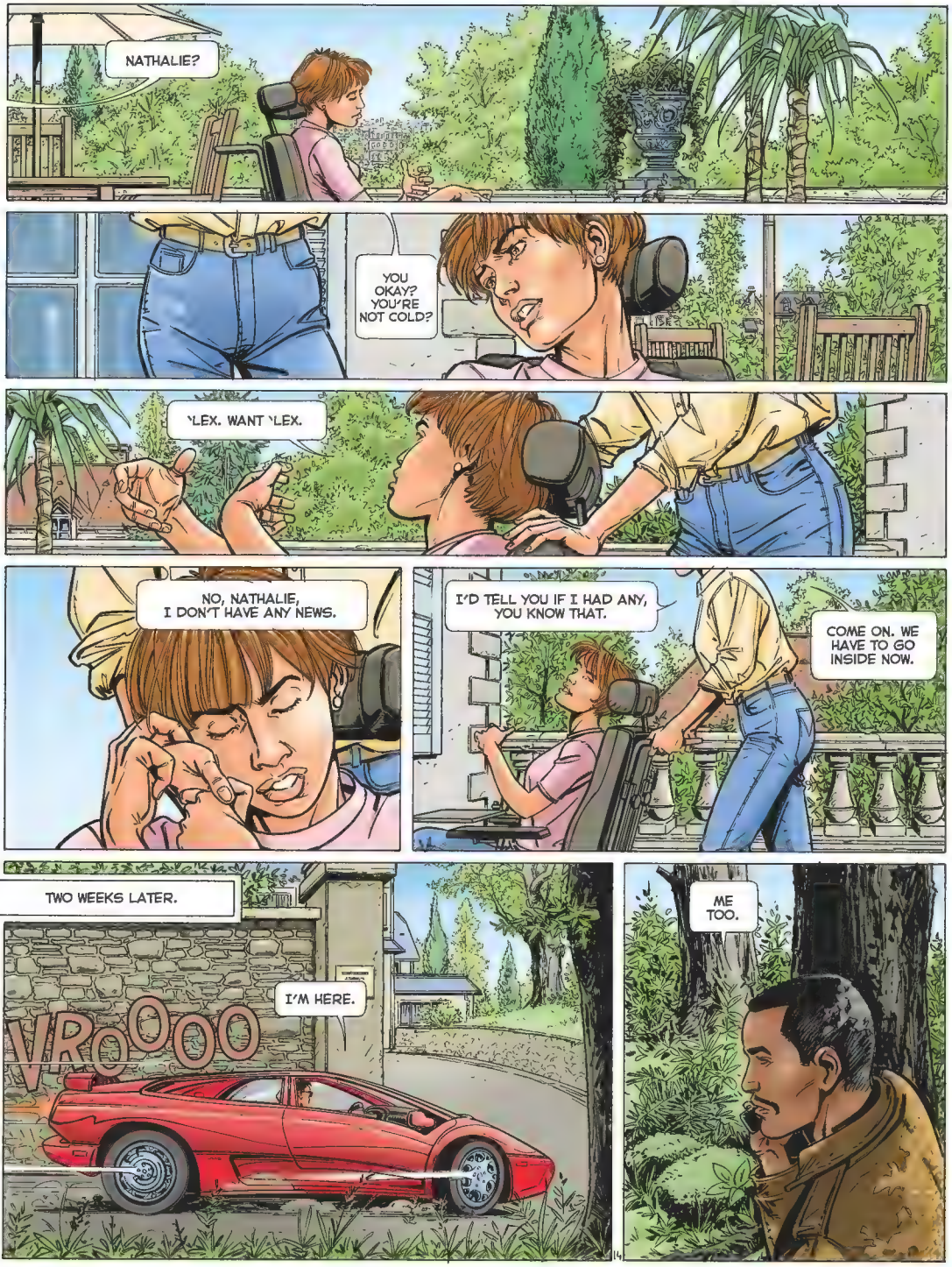

LOOK.
SOMEONE PUT FLOWERS ON MY MOTHER'S GRAVE AGAIN.

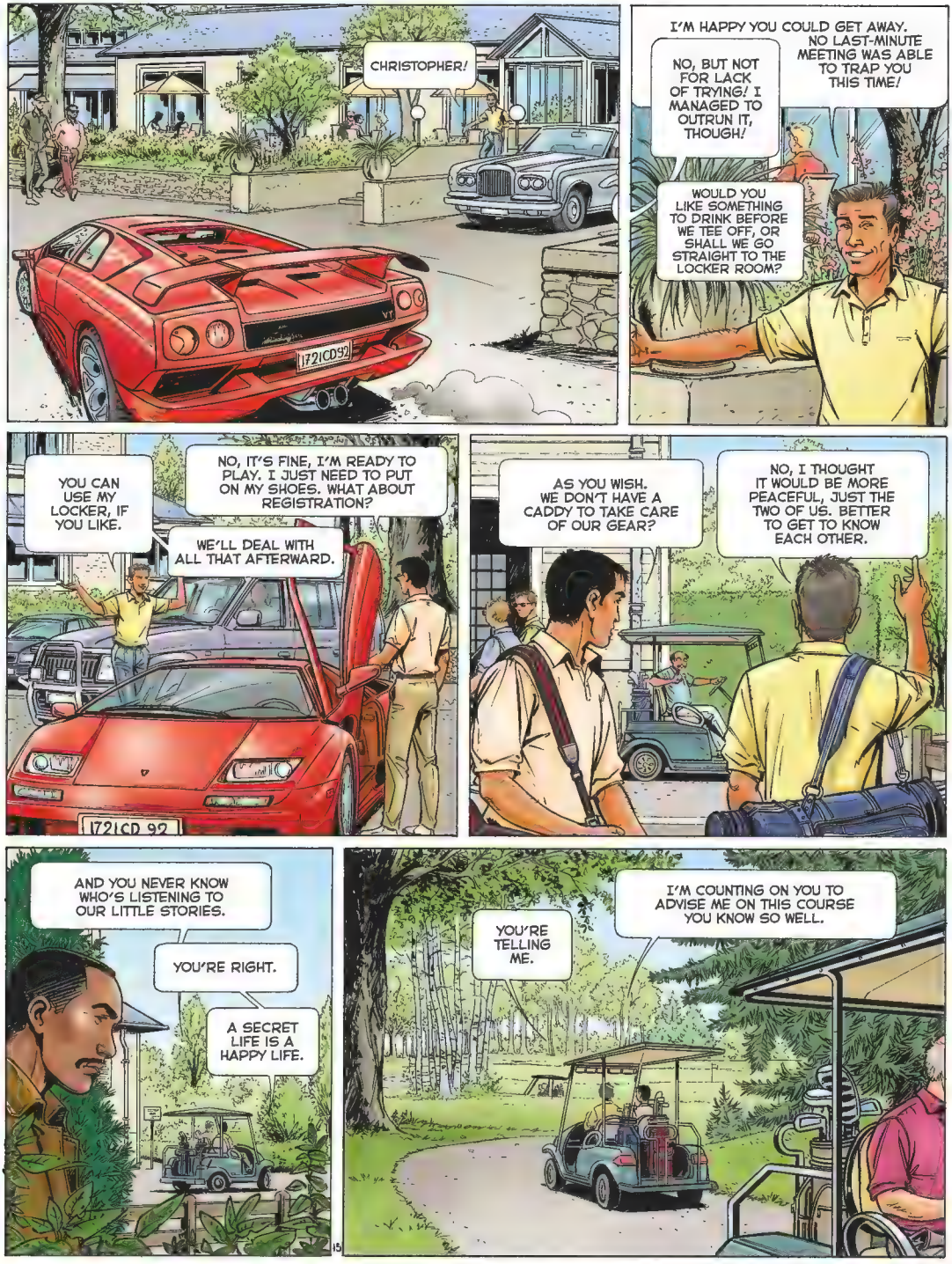

I COULDN'T FIND OUT ANYTHING. THE NEARBY FLORISTS COULDN'T HELP, NOR COULD YOUR MOTHER'S FRIENDS.
I'M SURE THAT THE PERSON WHO PUT THESE FLOWERS HERE KNOWS WHERE MY SISTER IS.
STILL NOTHING ON NATHALIE?

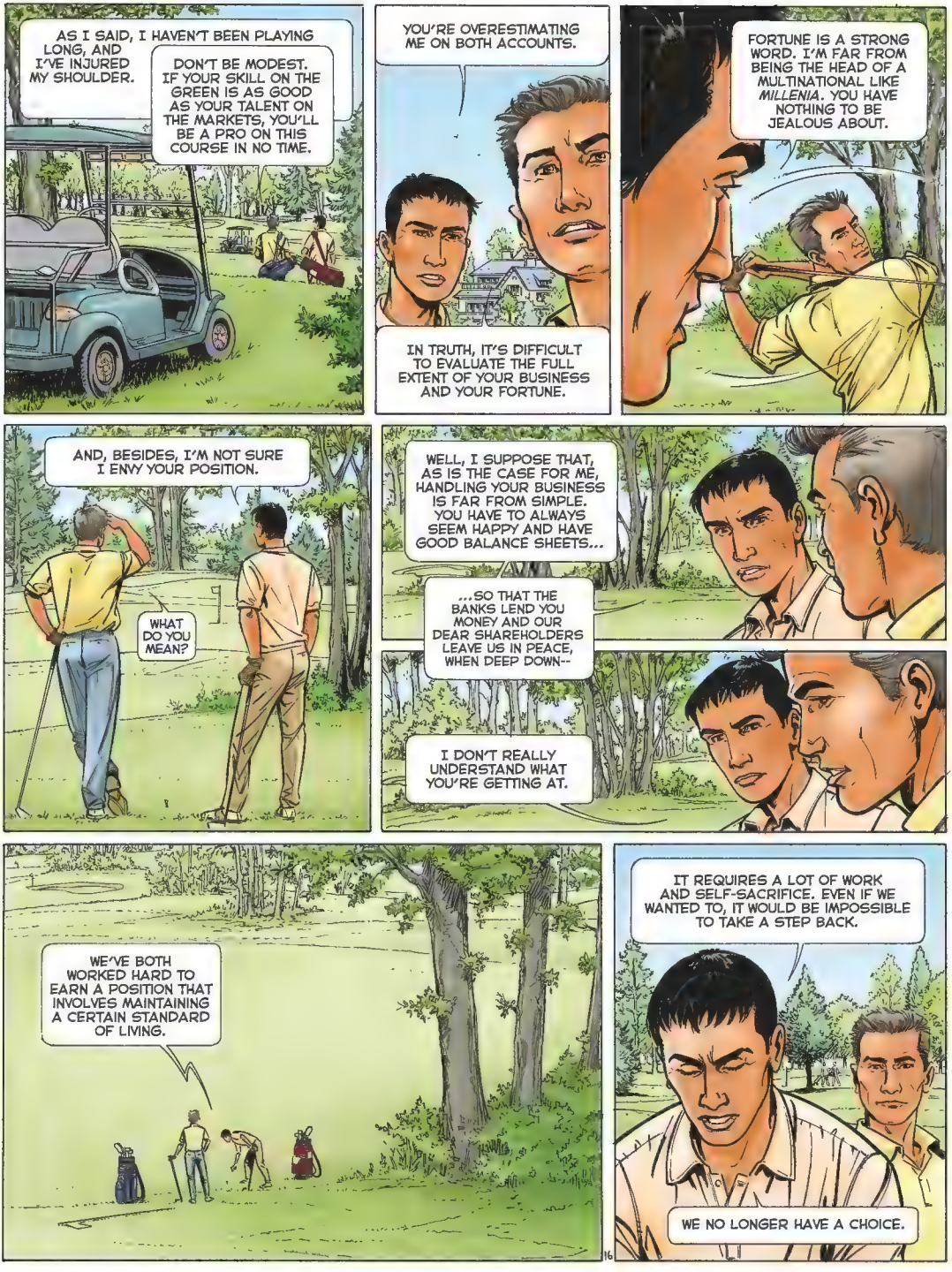

NO. I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO LOOK. I'VE GONE THROUGH EVERY DATABASE.
IT'S LIKE SHE VANISHED INTO THIN AIR.


WE'LL FIND HER. I PROMISE.
COME ON, WE SHOULDN'T STAY HERE.
THEY'RE STILL SEARCHING FOR ALEXANDRE SINCE HIS ESCAPE.


13
SO WHAT? I DON'T KNOW ANYONE NAMED ALEXANDRE.

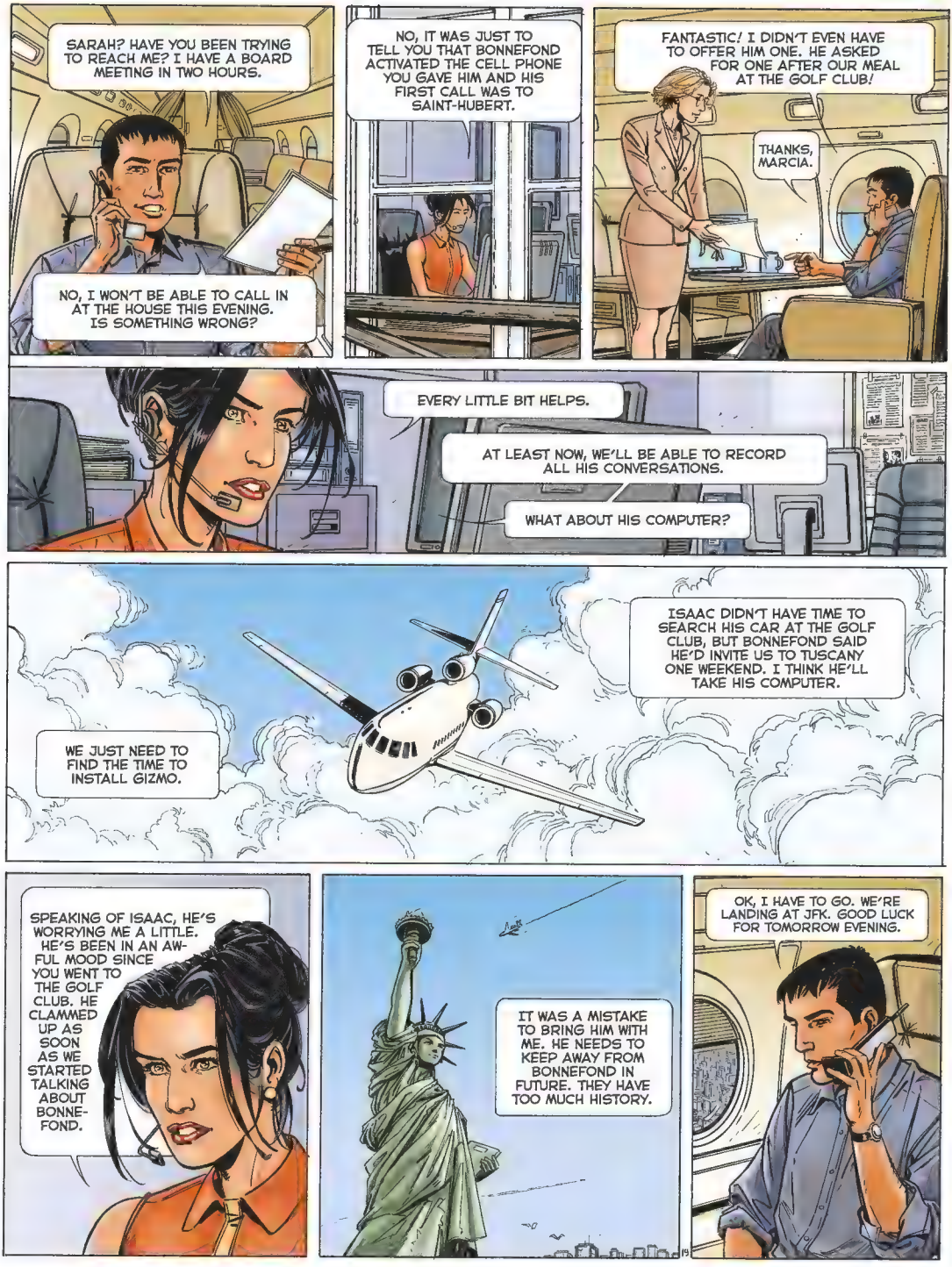

NATHALIE?
YOU OKAY? YOU'RE NOT COLD?
'LEX. WANT 'LEX.
NO, NATHALIE, I DON'T HAVE ANY NEWS.
I'D TELL YOU IF I HAD ANY, YOU KNOW THAT.
COME ON. WE HAVE TO GO INSIDE NOW.
TWO WEEKS LATER.
I'M HERE.
VROOOO
ME TOO.

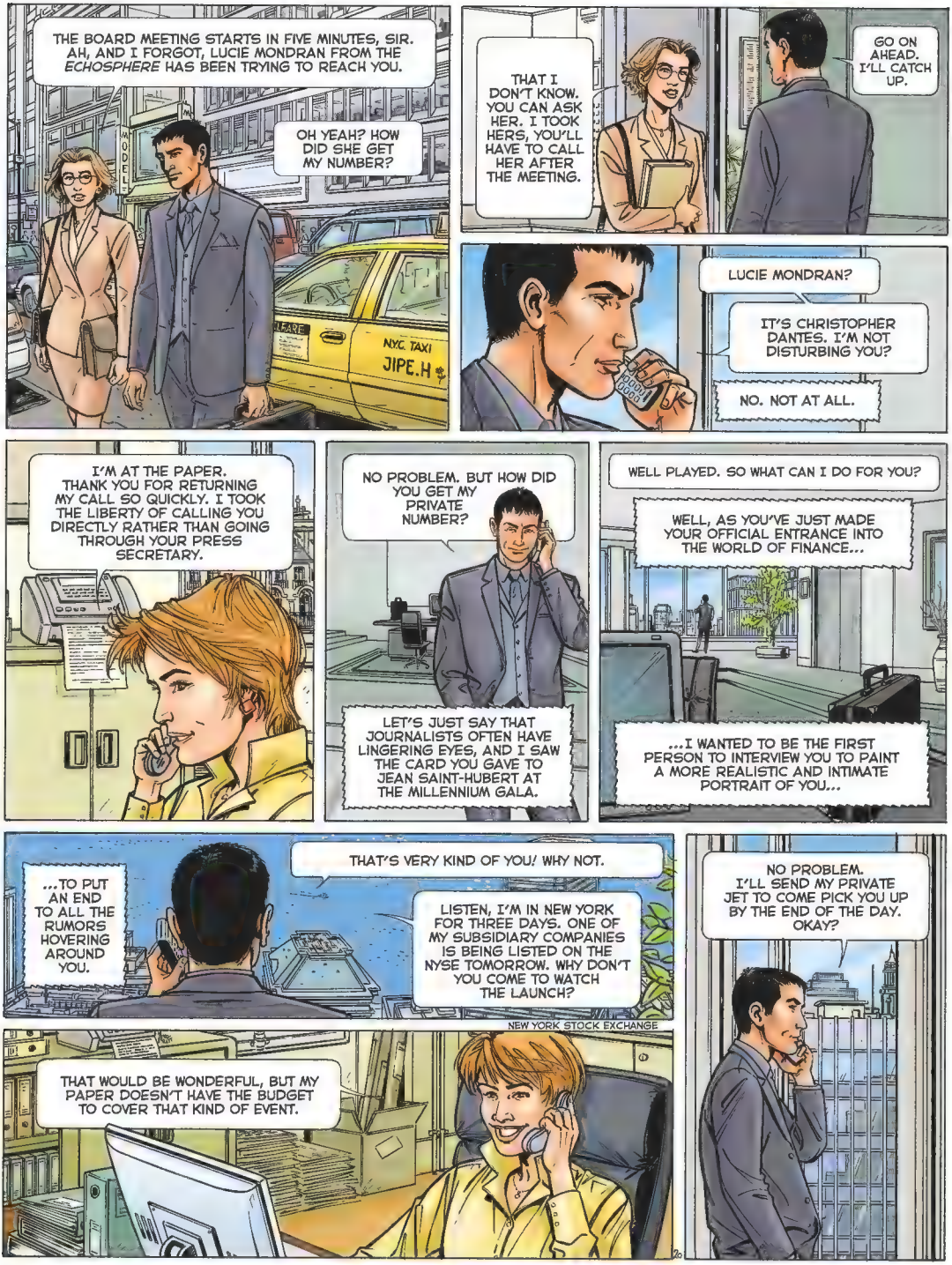

CHRISTOPHER!
I'M HAPPY YOU COULD GET AWAY. NO LAST-MINUTE MEETING WAS ABLE TO TRAP YOU THIS TIME!
NO, BUT NOT FOR LACK OF TRYING! I MANAGED TO OUTRUN IT, THOUGH!
WOULD YOU LIKE SOMETHING TO DRINK BEFORE WE TEE OFF, OR SHALL WE GO STRAIGHT TO THE LOCKER ROOM?
1721CD92
YOU CAN USE MY LOCKER, IF YOU LIKE.
NO, IT'S FINE, I'M READY TO PLAY. I JUST NEED TO PUT ON MY SHOES. WHAT ABOUT REGISTRATION?
WE'LL DEAL WITH ALL THAT AFTERWARD.
1721CD 92
AS YOU WISH. WE DON'T HAVE A CADDY TO TAKE CARE OF OUR GEAR?
NO, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE MORE PEACEFUL, JUST THE TWO OF US. BETTER TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER.
AND YOU NEVER KNOW WHO'S LISTENING TO OUR LITTLE STORIES.
YOU'RE RIGHT.
A SECRET LIFE IS A HAPPY LIFE.
15
YOU'RE TELLING ME.
I'M COUNTING ON YOU TO ADVISE ME ON THIS COURSE YOU KNOW SO WELL.

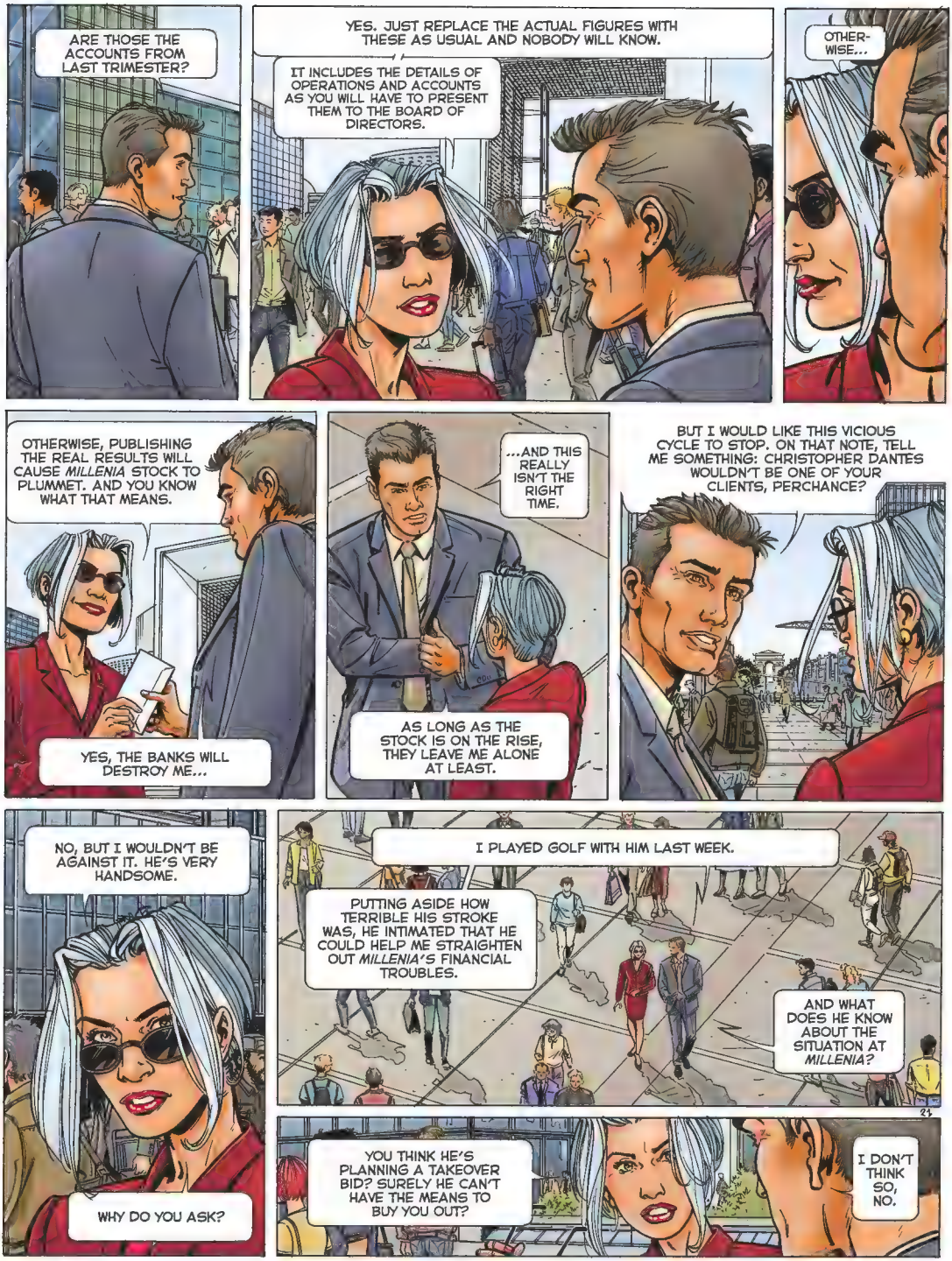

AS I SAID, I HAVEN'T BEEN PLAYING LONG, AND I'VE INJURED MY SHOULDER.
DON'T BE MODEST. IF YOUR SKILL ON THE GREEN IS AS GOOD AS YOUR TALENT ON THE MARKETS, YOU'LL BE A PRO ON THIS COURSE IN NO TIME.
YOU'RE OVERESTIMATING ME ON BOTH ACCOUNTS.
IN TRUTH, IT'S DIFFICULT TO EVALUATE THE FULL EXTENT OF YOUR BUSINESS AND YOUR FORTUNE.
FORTUNE IS A STRONG WORD. I'M FAR FROM BEING THE HEAD OF A MULTINATIONAL LIKE *MILLENIA*. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO BE JEALOUS ABOUT.
AND, BESIDES, I'M NOT SURE I ENVY YOUR POSITION.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WELL, I SUPPOSE THAT, AS IS THE CASE FOR ME, HANDLING YOUR BUSINESS IS FAR FROM SIMPLE. YOU HAVE TO ALWAYS SEEM HAPPY AND HAVE GOOD BALANCE SHEETS...
...SO THAT THE BANKS LEND YOU MONEY AND OUR DEAR SHAREHOLDERS LEAVE US IN PEACE, WHEN DEEP DOWN--
I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE GETTING AT.
WE'VE BOTH WORKED HARD TO EARN A POSITION THAT INVOLVES MAINTAINING A CERTAIN STANDARD OF LIVING.
IT REQUIRES A LOT OF WORK AND SELF-SACRIFICE. EVEN IF WE WANTED TO, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO TAKE A STEP BACK.
WE NO LONGER HAVE A CHOICE.
16

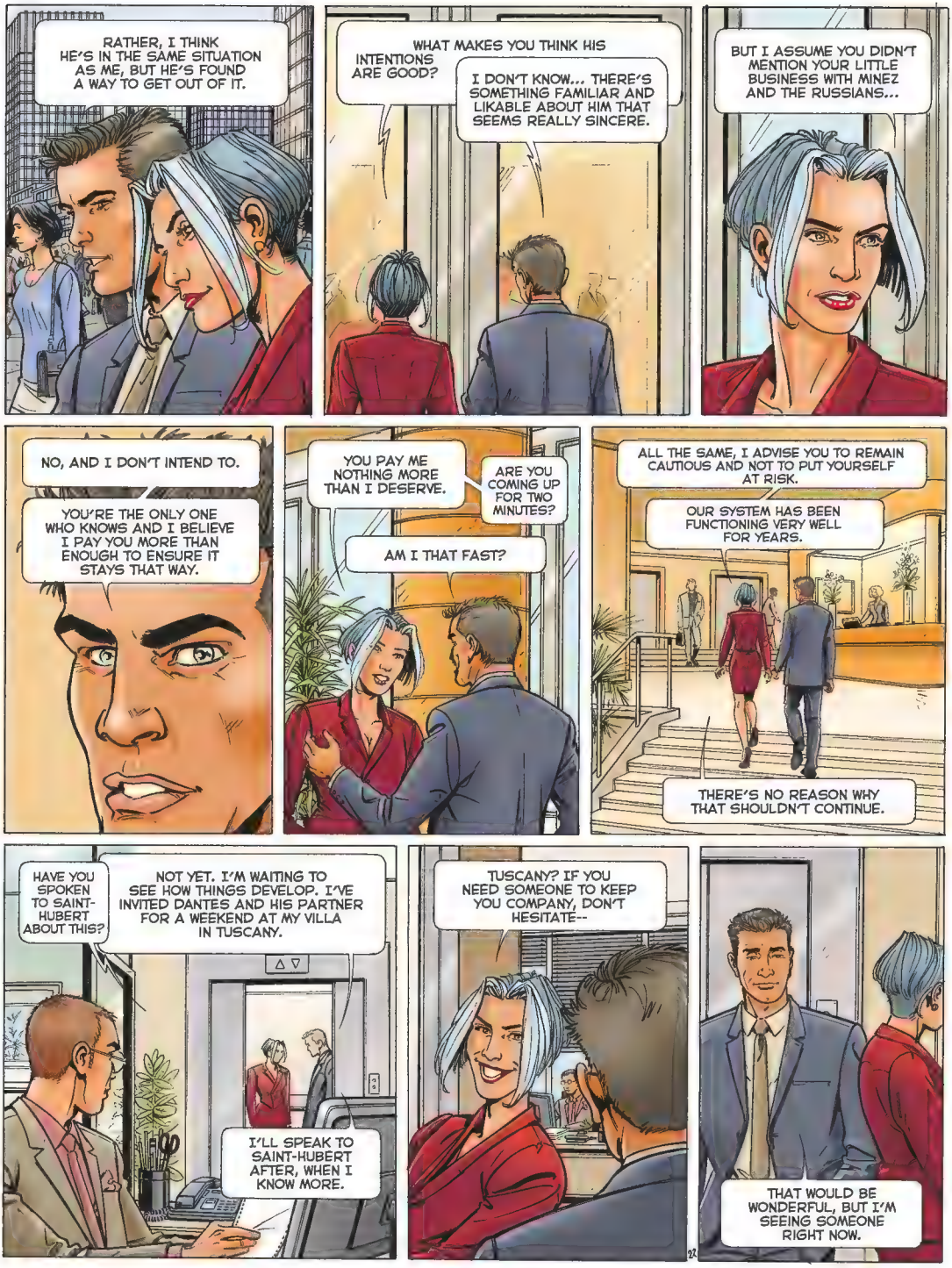
AND SOMETIMES THAT FORCES US TO TEST CERTAIN LIMITS. BUT THEN AGAIN, IT'S NOT LIKE WE HAVE A CHOICE, DO WE?
US BILLIONAIRES NEED TO STICK TOGETHER, RIGHT?
OTHERWISE, WHAT WOULD THE WORLD BE LIKE?
THAT SAID, IF YOU'RE EVER IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION, MAYBE I COULD HELP YOU GET OUT OF IT...
...AND CLEAN UP YOUR BUSINESS, MAKING THINGS LEGAL AND TURNING A PROFIT AGAIN.
YOU'RE STARTING TO INTEREST ME, MY DEAR CHRISTOPHER.
EVEN IF YOUR SWING IS PITIFUL.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING THERE?
THAT'S MR. BONNEFOND'S CAR AND YOU'RE NOT HIS DRIVER. GET OUT OF THE VEHICLE.
LET'S FINISH THIS HOLE AND WE CAN DISCUSS ALL THIS OVER A DRINK, OR LUNCH IF YOU HAVE THE TIME.
beep beep beep
EXCUSE ME.
YES... YES... WHAT? I'M COMING NOW.
WHAT IS IT?
I DON'T KNOW. THERE WAS A GUY IN MY CAR. HE PROBABLY WANTED TO STEAL IT. I HAVE TO GO. TAKE YOUR TIME AND FINISH YOUR GAME--
NO, NO. I'LL COME WITH YOU AND WE'LL CARRY ON LATER.
OR WE'LL HAVE LUNCH.
THANKS, CHRISTOPHER.

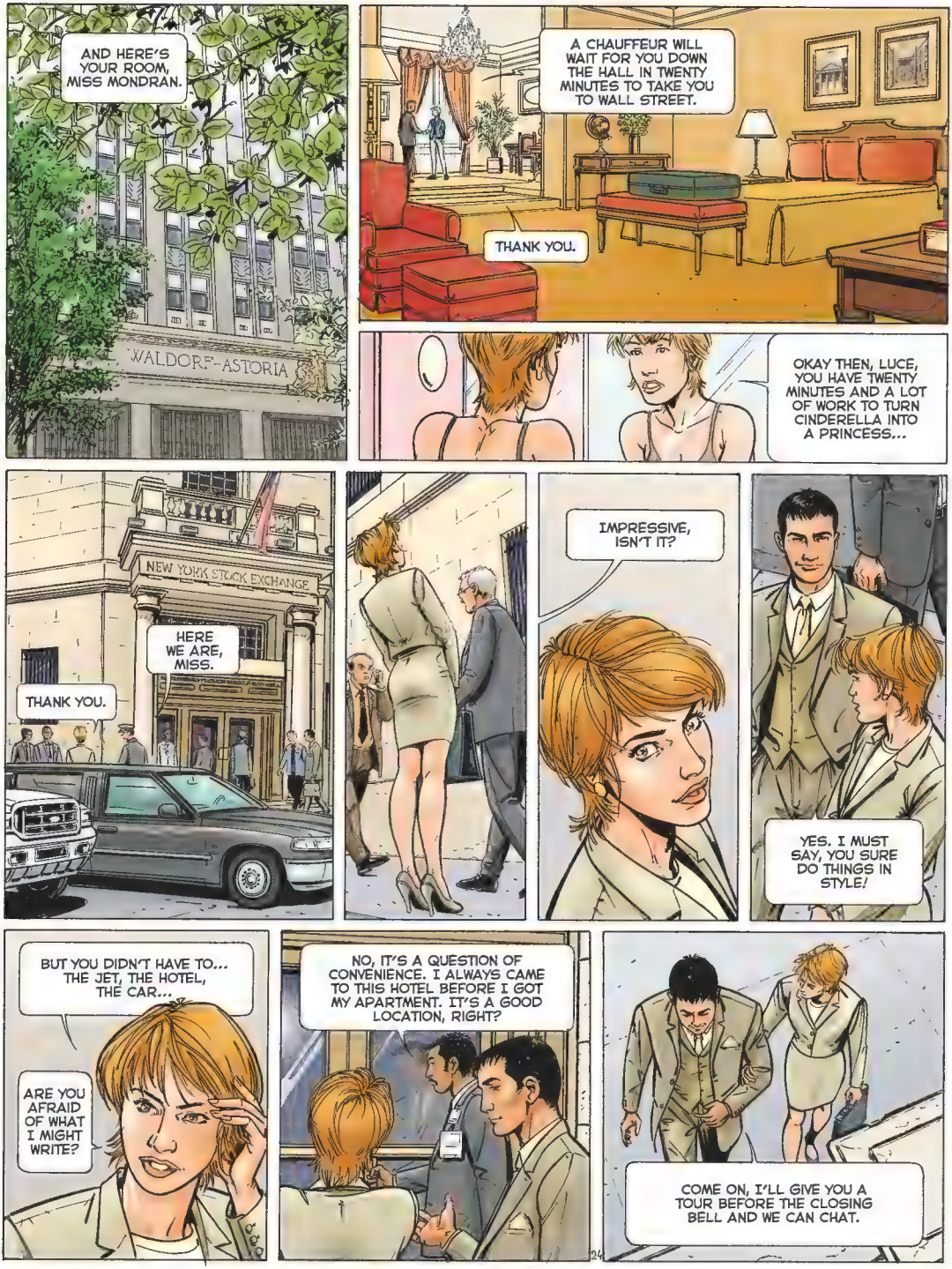

SARAH? HAVE YOU BEEN TRYING TO REACH ME? I HAVE A BOARD MEETING IN TWO HOURS.
NO, I WON'T BE ABLE TO CALL IN AT THE HOUSE THIS EVENING. IS SOMETHING WRONG?
NO, IT WAS JUST TO TELL YOU THAT BONNEFOND ACTIVATED THE CELL PHONE YOU GAVE HIM AND HIS FIRST CALL WAS TO SAINT-HUBERT.
FANTASTIC! I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO OFFER HIM ONE. HE ASKED FOR ONE AFTER OUR MEAL AT THE GOLF CLUB!
THANKS, MARCIA.
EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS.
AT LEAST NOW, WE'LL BE ABLE TO RECORD ALL HIS CONVERSATIONS.
WHAT ABOUT HIS COMPUTER?
ISAAC DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO SEARCH HIS CAR AT THE GOLF CLUB, BUT BONNEFOND SAID HE'D INVITE US TO TUSCANY ONE WEEKEND. I THINK HE'LL TAKE HIS COMPUTER.
WE JUST NEED TO FIND THE TIME TO INSTALL GIZMO.
SPEAKING OF ISAAC, HE'S WORRYING ME A LITTLE. HE'S BEEN IN AN AWFUL MOOD SINCE YOU WENT TO THE GOLF CLUB. HE CLAMMED UP AS SOON AS WE STARTED TALKING ABOUT BONNEFOND.
IT WAS A MISTAKE TO BRING HIM WITH ME. HE NEEDS TO KEEP AWAY FROM BONNEFOND IN FUTURE. THEY HAVE TOO MUCH HISTORY.
OK, I HAVE TO GO. WE'RE LANDING AT JFK. GOOD LUCK FOR TOMORROW EVENING.

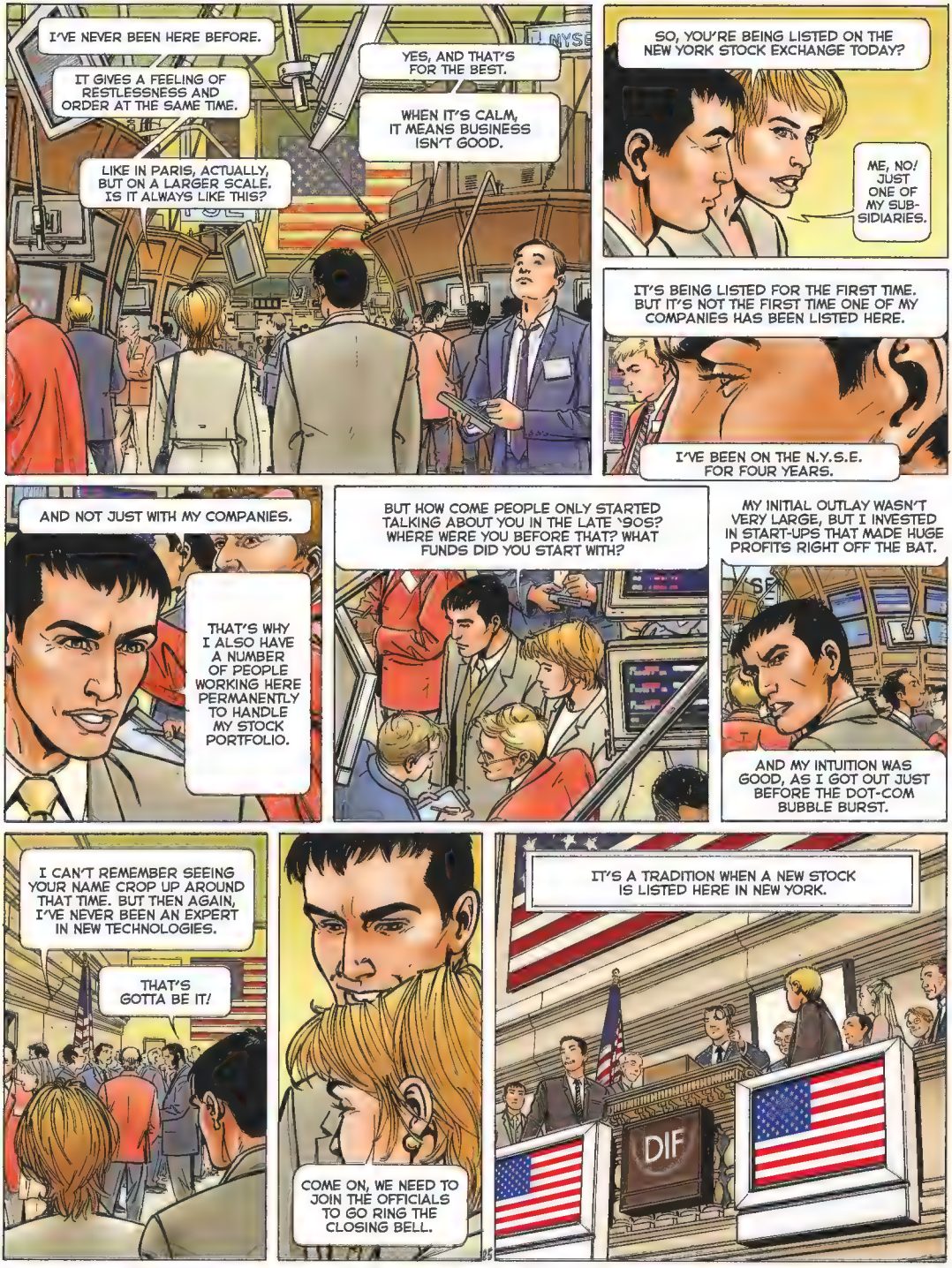

THE BOARD MEETING STARTS IN FIVE MINUTES, SIR. AH, AND I FORGOT, LUCIE MONDRAN FROM THE *ECHOSPHERE* HAS BEEN TRYING TO REACH YOU.
OH YEAH? HOW DID SHE GET MY NUMBER?
NYC TAXI
THAT I DON'T KNOW. YOU CAN ASK HER. I TOOK HERS, YOU'LL HAVE TO CALL HER AFTER THE MEETING.
GO ON AHEAD. I'LL CATCH UP.
LUCIE MONDRAN?
IT'S CHRISTOPHER DANTES. I'M NOT DISTURBING YOU?
NO. NOT AT ALL.
I'M AT THE PAPER. THANK YOU FOR RETURNING MY CALL SO QUICKLY. I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF CALLING YOU DIRECTLY RATHER THAN GOING THROUGH YOUR PRESS SECRETARY.
NO PROBLEM. BUT HOW DID YOU GET MY PRIVATE NUMBER?
LET'S JUST SAY THAT JOURNALISTS OFTEN HAVE LINGERING EYES, AND I SAW THE CARD YOU GAVE TO JEAN SAINT-HUBERT AT THE MILLENNIUM GALA.
WELL PLAYED. SO WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
WELL, AS YOU'VE JUST MADE YOUR OFFICIAL ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD OF FINANCE...
...I WANTED TO BE THE FIRST PERSON TO INTERVIEW YOU TO PAINT A MORE REALISTIC AND INTIMATE PORTRAIT OF YOU...
...TO PUT AN END TO ALL THE RUMORS HOVERING AROUND YOU.
THAT'S VERY KIND OF YOU! WHY NOT.
LISTEN, I'M IN NEW YORK FOR THREE DAYS. ONE OF MY SUBSIDIARY COMPANIES IS BEING LISTED ON THE NYSE TOMORROW. WHY DON'T YOU COME TO WATCH THE LAUNCH?
NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE
THAT WOULD BE WONDERFUL, BUT MY PAPER DOESN'T HAVE THE BUDGET TO COVER THAT KIND OF EVENT.
NO PROBLEM. I'LL SEND MY PRIVATE JET TO COME PICK YOU UP BY THE END OF THE DAY. OKAY?

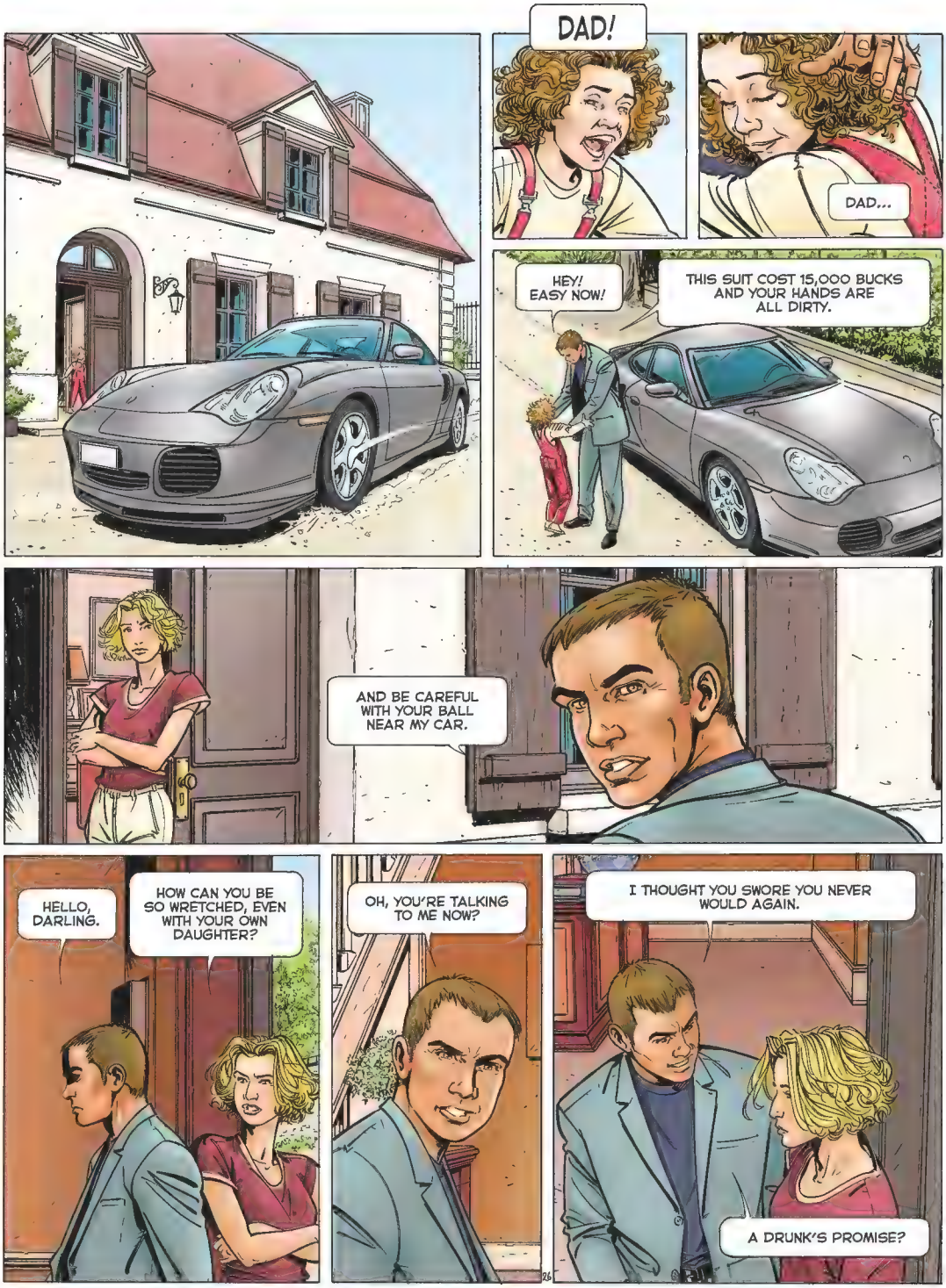

ARE THOSE THE ACCOUNTS FROM LAST TRIMESTER?
YES. JUST REPLACE THE ACTUAL FIGURES WITH THESE AS USUAL AND NOBODY WILL KNOW.
IT INCLUDES THE DETAILS OF OPERATIONS AND ACCOUNTS AS YOU WILL HAVE TO PRESENT THEM TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.
OTHER-WISE...
OTHERWISE, PUBLISHING THE REAL RESULTS WILL CAUSE *MILLENIA* STOCK TO PLUMMET. AND YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.
YES, THE BANKS WILL DESTROY ME...
...AND THIS REALLY ISN'T THE RIGHT TIME.
AS LONG AS THE STOCK IS ON THE RISE, THEY LEAVE ME ALONE AT LEAST.
BUT I WOULD LIKE THIS VICIOUS CYCLE TO STOP. ON THAT NOTE, TELL ME SOMETHING: CHRISTOPHER DANTES WOULDN'T BE ONE OF YOUR CLIENTS, PERCHANCE?
NO, BUT I WOULDN'T BE AGAINST IT. HE'S VERY HANDSOME.
WHY DO YOU ASK?
I PLAYED GOLF WITH HIM LAST WEEK.
PUTTING ASIDE HOW TERRIBLE HIS STROKE WAS, HE INTIMATED THAT HE COULD HELP ME STRAIGHTEN OUT *MILLENIA'S* FINANCIAL TROUBLES.
AND WHAT DOES HE KNOW ABOUT THE SITUATION AT *MILLENIA?*
23
YOU THINK HE'S PLANNING A TAKEOVER BID? SURELY HE CAN'T HAVE THE MEANS TO BUY YOU OUT?
I DON'T THINK SO, NO.

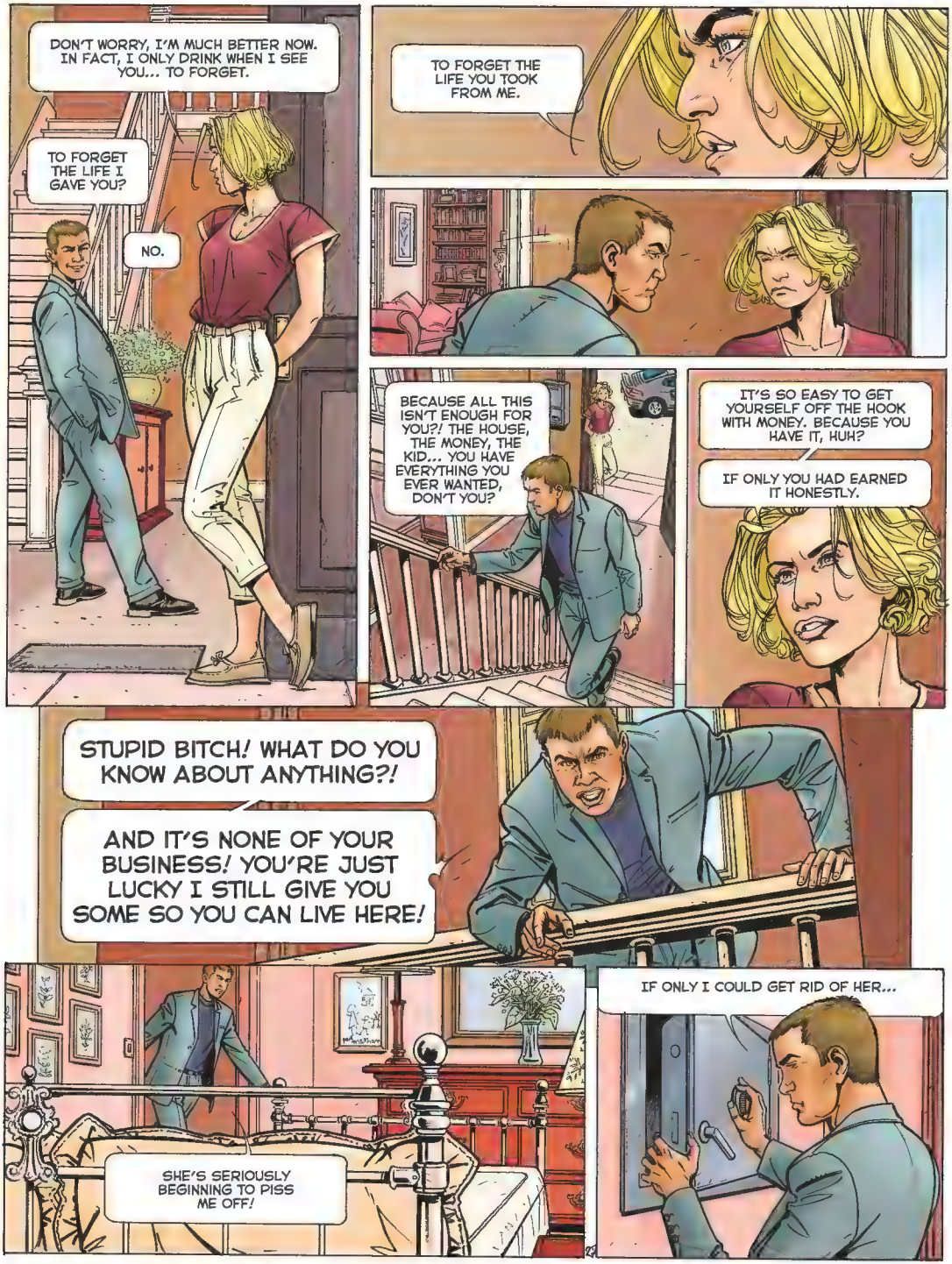

RATHER, I THINK HE'S IN THE SAME SITUATION AS ME, BUT HE'S FOUND A WAY TO GET OUT OF IT.
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK HIS INTENTIONS ARE GOOD?
I DON'T KNOW... THERE'S SOMETHING FAMILIAR AND LIKABLE ABOUT HIM THAT SEEMS REALLY SINCERE.
BUT I ASSUME YOU DIDN'T MENTION YOUR LITTLE BUSINESS WITH MINEZ AND THE RUSSIANS...
NO, AND I DON'T INTEND TO.
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS AND I BELIEVE I PAY YOU MORE THAN ENOUGH TO ENSURE IT STAYS THAT WAY.
YOU PAY ME NOTHING MORE THAN I DESERVE.
ARE YOU COMING UP FOR TWO MINUTES?
AM I THAT FAST?
ALL THE SAME, I ADVISE YOU TO REMAIN CAUTIOUS AND NOT TO PUT YOURSELF AT RISK.
OUR SYSTEM HAS BEEN FUNCTIONING VERY WELL FOR YEARS.
THERE'S NO REASON WHY THAT SHOULDN'T CONTINUE.
HAVE YOU SPOKEN TO SAINT-HUBERT ABOUT THIS?
NOT YET. I'M WAITING TO SEE HOW THINGS DEVELOP. I'VE INVITED DANTES AND HIS PARTNER FOR A WEEKEND AT MY VILLA IN TUSCANY.
I'LL SPEAK TO SAINT-HUBERT AFTER, WHEN I KNOW MORE.
TUSCANY? IF YOU NEED SOMEONE TO KEEP YOU COMPANY, DON'T HESITATE--
THAT WOULD BE WONDERFUL, BUT I'M SEEING SOMEONE RIGHT NOW.

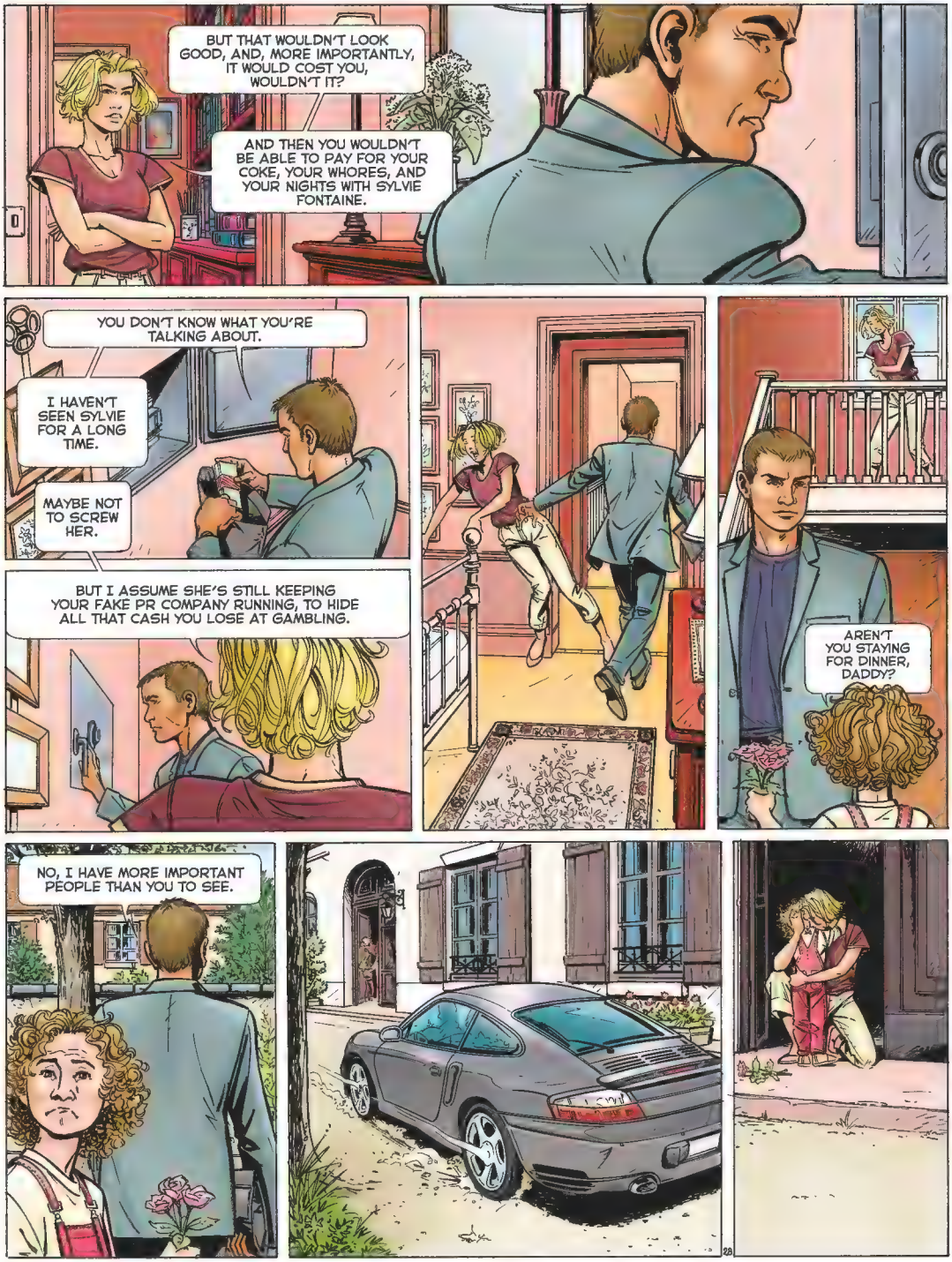
HEY... WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY OFFICE?!
MY JOB, MA'AM.
THEY ASKED ME TO UPDATE YOUR COMPUTER NOW THAT THE NEW OPERATING SYSTEM HAS BEEN INSTALLED ON THE COMPANY NETWORK.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
NOTHING, IT'S FINE. I'D FORGOTTEN THAT IT WAS BEING INSTALLED TODAY.
I WON'T KEEP YOU ANY LONGER. CONTINUE YOUR WORK.
LET MY ASSISTANT KNOW WHEN YOU'VE FINISHED.
OKAY, MA'AM. BUT I'LL ALSO NEED YOUR CELL PHONE TO SYNCHRONIZE IT WITH YOUR COMPUTER.
VERY WELL.
HOW MUCH LONGER WILL IT TAKE?
A QUARTER-HOUR AT THE MOST.
WHO'S THAT GUY?
DID YOU SEE THE WAY HE LOOKED AT US?
I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THOSE GUYS. I CAN'T TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING.
COME ON, LET'S GO TO THE LOUNGE.
23


AND HERE'S YOUR ROOM, MISS MONDRAN.
WALDORF-ASTORIA
A CHAUFFEUR WILL WAIT FOR YOU DOWN THE HALL IN TWENTY MINUTES TO TAKE YOU TO WALL STREET.
THANK YOU.
OKAY THEN, LUCE, YOU HAVE TWENTY MINUTES AND A LOT OF WORK TO TURN CINDERELLA INTO A PRINCESS...
NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE
HERE WE ARE, MISS.
THANK YOU.
IMPRESSIVE, ISN'T IT?
YES. I MUST SAY, YOU SURE DO THINGS IN STYLE!
BUT YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO... THE JET, THE HOTEL, THE CAR...
ARE YOU AFRAID OF WHAT I MIGHT WRITE?
NO, IT'S A QUESTION OF CONVENIENCE. I ALWAYS CAME TO THIS HOTEL BEFORE I GOT MY APARTMENT. IT'S A GOOD LOCATION, RIGHT?
COME ON, I'LL GIVE YOU A TOUR BEFORE THE CLOSING BELL AND WE CAN CHAT.

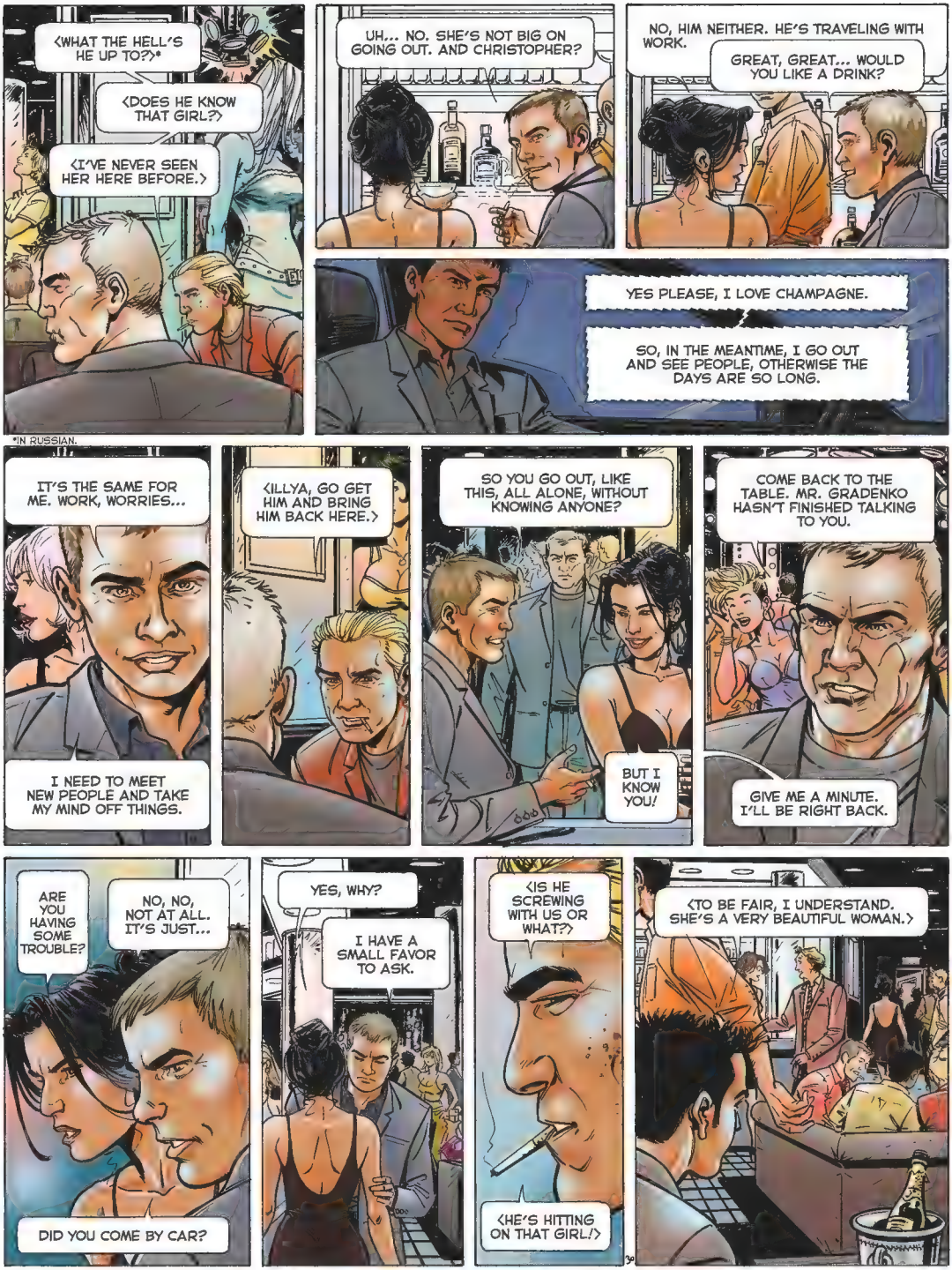

I'VE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE.
IT GIVES A FEELING OF RESTLESSNESS AND ORDER AT THE SAME TIME.
LIKE IN PARIS, ACTUALLY, BUT ON A LARGER SCALE. IS IT ALWAYS LIKE THIS?
YES, AND THAT'S FOR THE BEST.
WHEN IT'S CALM, IT MEANS BUSINESS ISN'T GOOD.
NYSE
SO, YOU'RE BEING LISTED ON THE NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE TODAY?
ME, NO! JUST ONE OF MY SUB-SIDIARIES.
IT'S BEING LISTED FOR THE FIRST TIME. BUT IT'S NOT THE FIRST TIME ONE OF MY COMPANIES HAS BEEN LISTED HERE.
I'VE BEEN ON THE N.Y.S.E. FOR FOUR YEARS.
AND NOT JUST WITH MY COMPANIES.
THAT'S WHY I ALSO HAVE A NUMBER OF PEOPLE WORKING HERE PERMANENTLY TO HANDLE MY STOCK PORTFOLIO.
BUT HOW COME PEOPLE ONLY STARTED TALKING ABOUT YOU IN THE LATE '90S? WHERE WERE YOU BEFORE THAT? WHAT FUNDS DID YOU START WITH?
MY INITIAL OUTLAY WASN'T VERY LARGE, BUT I INVESTED IN START-UPS THAT MADE HUGE PROFITS RIGHT OFF THE BAT.
AND MY INTUITION WAS GOOD, AS I GOT OUT JUST BEFORE THE DOT-COM BUBBLE BURST.
I CAN'T REMEMBER SEEING YOUR NAME CROP UP AROUND THAT TIME. BUT THEN AGAIN, I'VE NEVER BEEN AN EXPERT IN NEW TECHNOLOGIES.
THAT'S GOTTA BE IT!
COME ON, WE NEED TO JOIN THE OFFICIALS TO GO RING THE CLOSING BELL.
IT'S A TRADITION WHEN A NEW STOCK IS LISTED HERE IN NEW YORK.
DIF

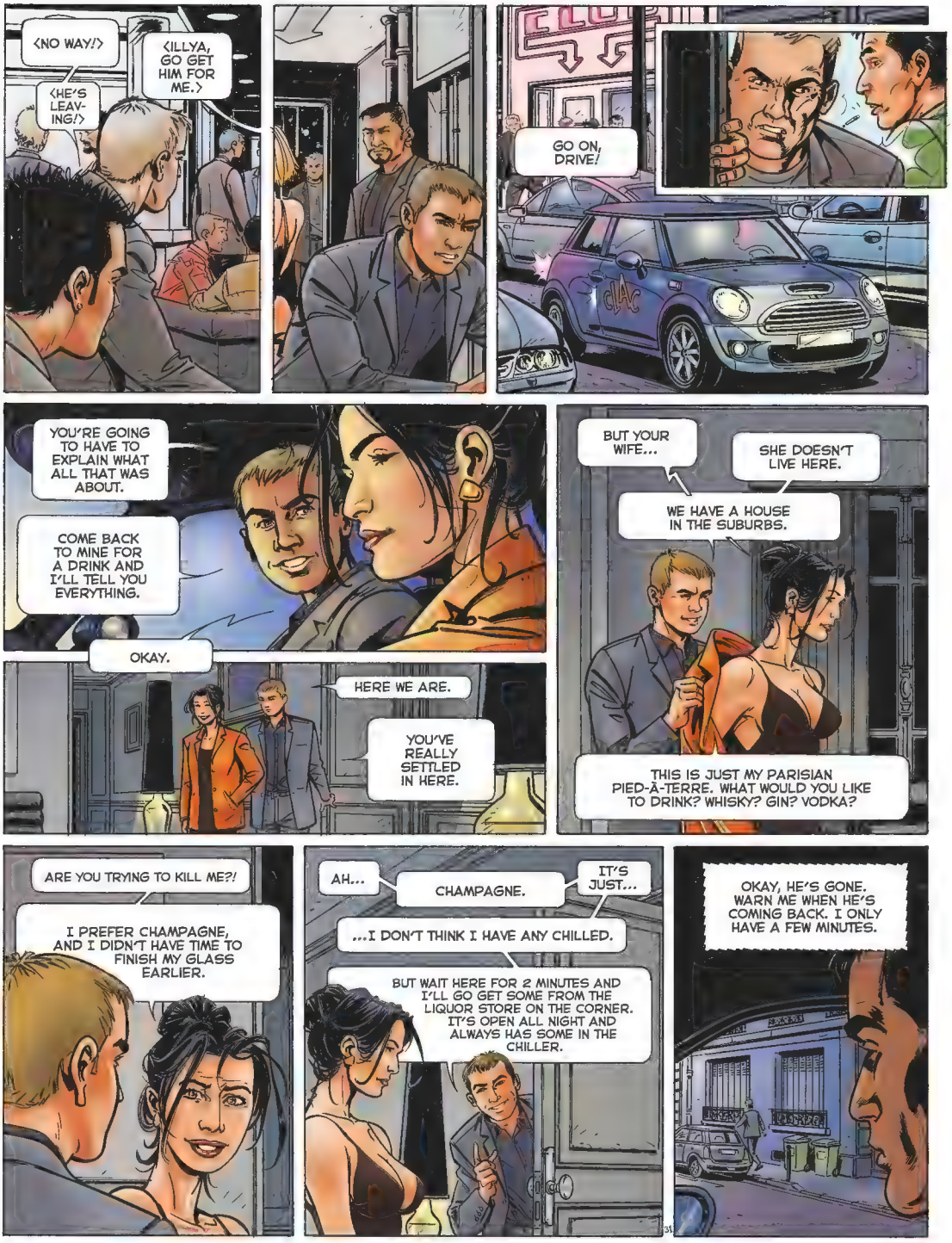

DAD!
DAD...
HEY! EASY NOW!
THIS SUIT COST 15,000 BUCKS AND YOUR HANDS ARE ALL DIRTY.
AND BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR BALL NEAR MY CAR.
HELLO, DARLING.
HOW CAN YOU BE SO WRETCHED, EVEN WITH YOUR OWN DAUGHTER?
OH, YOU'RE TALKING TO ME NOW?
I THOUGHT YOU SWORE YOU NEVER WOULD AGAIN.
A DRUNK'S PROMISE?


DON'T WORRY, I'M MUCH BETTER NOW. IN FACT, I ONLY DRINK WHEN I SEE YOU... TO FORGET.
TO FORGET THE LIFE I GAVE YOU?
NO.
TO FORGET THE LIFE YOU TOOK FROM ME.
BECAUSE ALL THIS ISN'T ENOUGH FOR YOU?! THE HOUSE, THE MONEY, THE KID... YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED, DON'T YOU?
IT'S SO EASY TO GET YOURSELF OFF THE HOOK WITH MONEY. BECAUSE YOU HAVE IT, HUH?
IF ONLY YOU HAD EARNED IT HONESTLY.
STUPID BITCH! WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ANYTHING?!
AND IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS! YOU'RE JUST LUCKY I STILL GIVE YOU SOME SO YOU CAN LIVE HERE!
SHE'S SERIOUSLY BEGINNING TO PISS ME OFF!
IF ONLY I COULD GET RID OF HER...

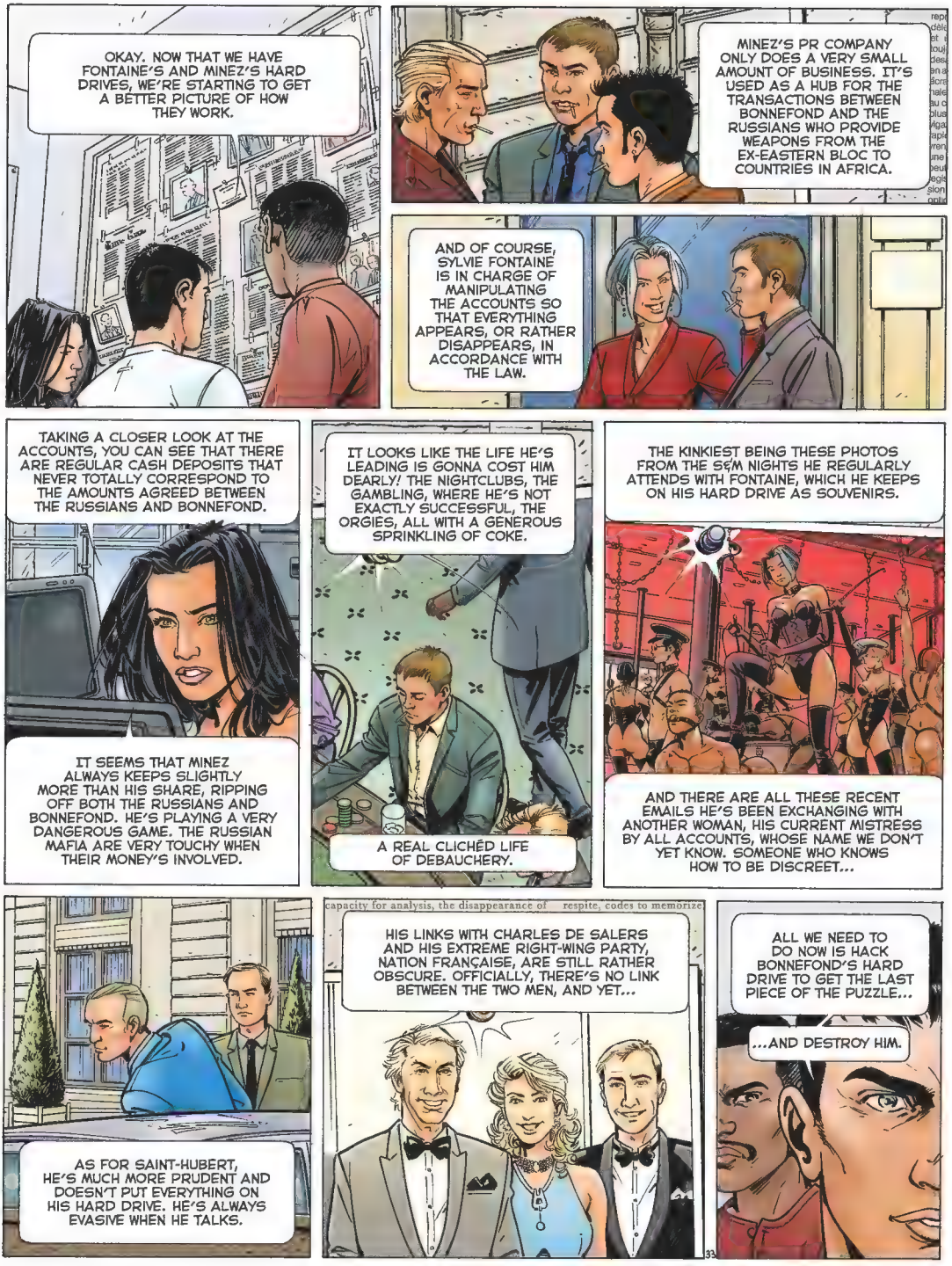

BUT THAT WOULDN'T LOOK GOOD, AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT WOULD COST YOU, WOULDN'T IT?
AND THEN YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO PAY FOR YOUR COKE, YOUR WHORES, AND YOUR NIGHTS WITH SYLVIE FONTAINE.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.
I HAVEN'T SEEN SYLVIE FOR A LONG TIME.
MAYBE NOT TO SCREW HER.
BUT I ASSUME SHE'S STILL KEEPING YOUR FAKE PR COMPANY RUNNING, TO HIDE ALL THAT CASH YOU LOSE AT GAMBLING.
AREN'T YOU STAYING FOR DINNER, DADDY?
NO, I HAVE MORE IMPORTANT PEOPLE THAN YOU TO SEE.

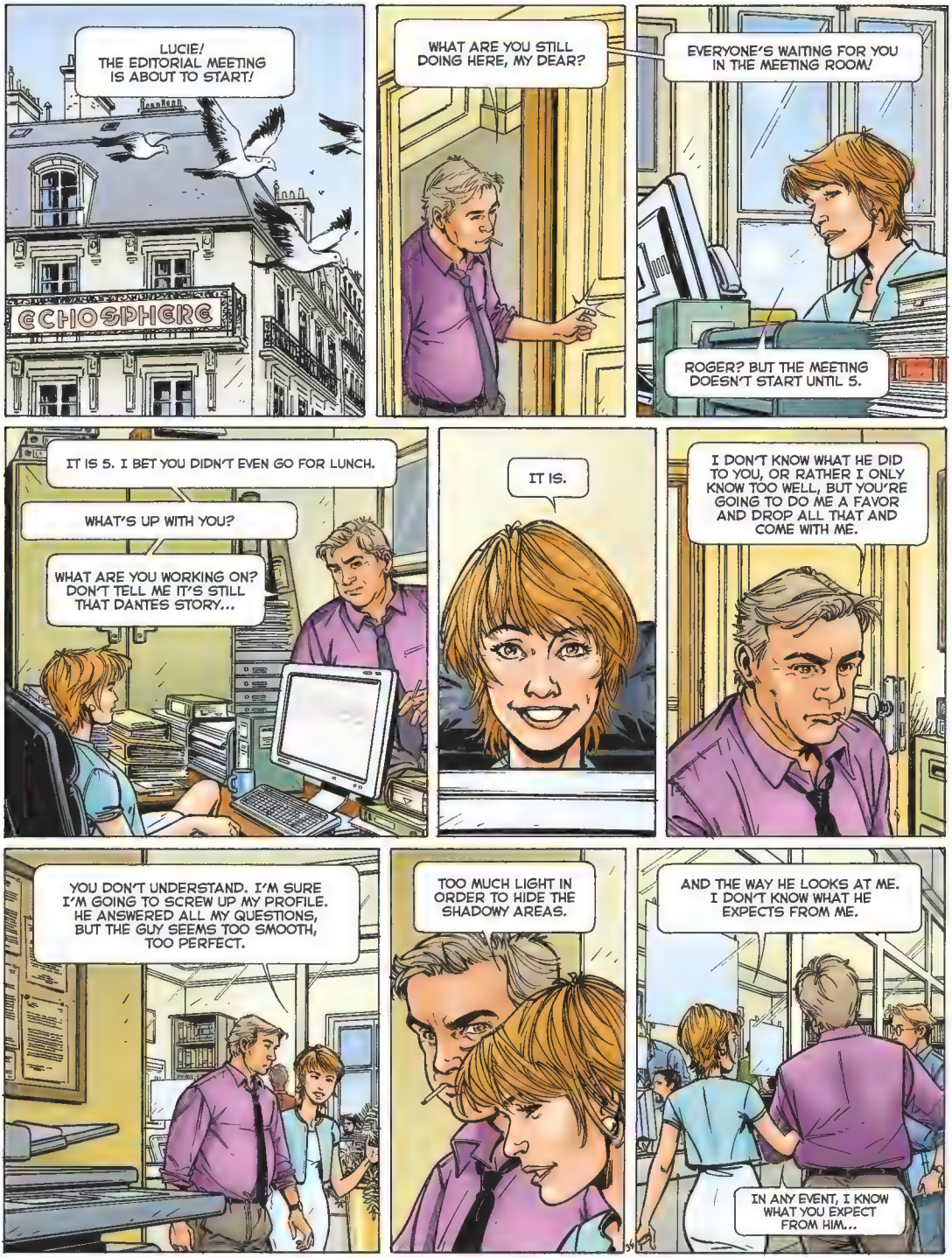
WELL, MR. MINEZ, I HOPE YOU'RE IN A POSITION TO TELL US WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH OUR MONEY.
WHAT MONEY? THE MONEY I'VE MADE YOU SELLING YOUR LOUSY WEAPONS TO AFRICAN COUNTRIES, WHERE THEY'D RATHER FIGHT THAN EAT?
THIS MIGHT BE FUNNY TO YOU, MR. MINEZ, BUT WE ARE NOT AMUSED. WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE MONEY YOU INVESTED FOR US. WE HAVEN'T SEEN ONE LOUSY KOPEK IN RETURN.
LET'S NOT EXAGGERATE!
IT'S NOT LIKE I'VE NEVER MADE YOU MONEY BEFORE, IS IT?
WITH THESE INVESTMENTS, IT TAKES TIME IF YOU WANT A GOOD RETURN, AND--
EXCUSE ME, I JUST NEED A MINUTE.
WAIT.
COME BACK, WE HAVEN'T FINISHED.
HELLO.
YOU'RE SARAH, AREN'T YOU?
WE MET AT THE MILLENNIUM GALA. YOU WERE WITH CHRISTOPHER DANTES.
AND YOU WERE WITH YOUR WIFE.
I REMEMBER IT WELL.
SHE ISN'T HERE?
29

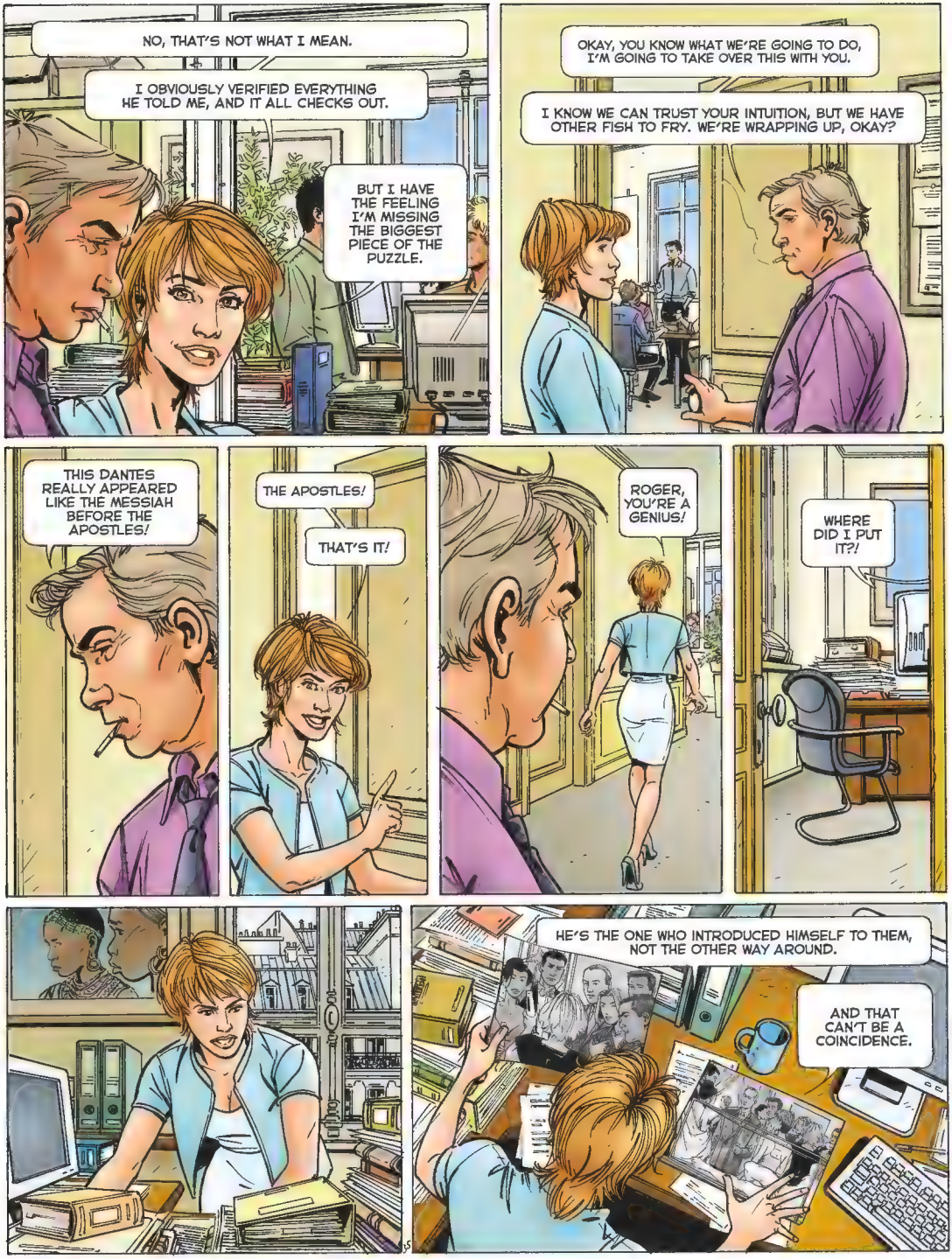

‹WHAT THE HELL'S HE UP TO?›*
‹DOES HE KNOW THAT GIRL?›
‹I'VE NEVER SEEN HER HERE BEFORE.›
UH... NO. SHE'S NOT BIG ON GOING OUT. AND CHRISTOPHER?
NO, HIM NEITHER. HE'S TRAVELING WITH WORK.
GREAT, GREAT... WOULD YOU LIKE A DRINK?
YES PLEASE, I LOVE CHAMPAGNE.
SO, IN THE MEANTIME, I GO OUT AND SEE PEOPLE, OTHERWISE THE DAYS ARE SO LONG.
*IN RUSSIAN.
IT'S THE SAME FOR ME. WORK, WORRIES...
I NEED TO MEET NEW PEOPLE AND TAKE MY MIND OFF THINGS.
‹ILLYA, GO GET HIM AND BRING HIM BACK HERE.›
SO YOU GO OUT, LIKE THIS, ALL ALONE, WITHOUT KNOWING ANYONE?
BUT I KNOW YOU!
COME BACK TO THE TABLE. MR. GRADENKO HASN'T FINISHED TALKING TO YOU.
GIVE ME A MINUTE. I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.
ARE YOU HAVING SOME TROUBLE?
NO, NO, NOT AT ALL. IT'S JUST...
DID YOU COME BY CAR?
YES, WHY?
I HAVE A SMALL FAVOR TO ASK.
‹IS HE SCREWING WITH US OR WHAT?›
‹HE'S HITTING ON THAT GIRL!›
‹TO BE FAIR, I UNDERSTAND. SHE'S A VERY BEAUTIFUL WOMAN.›

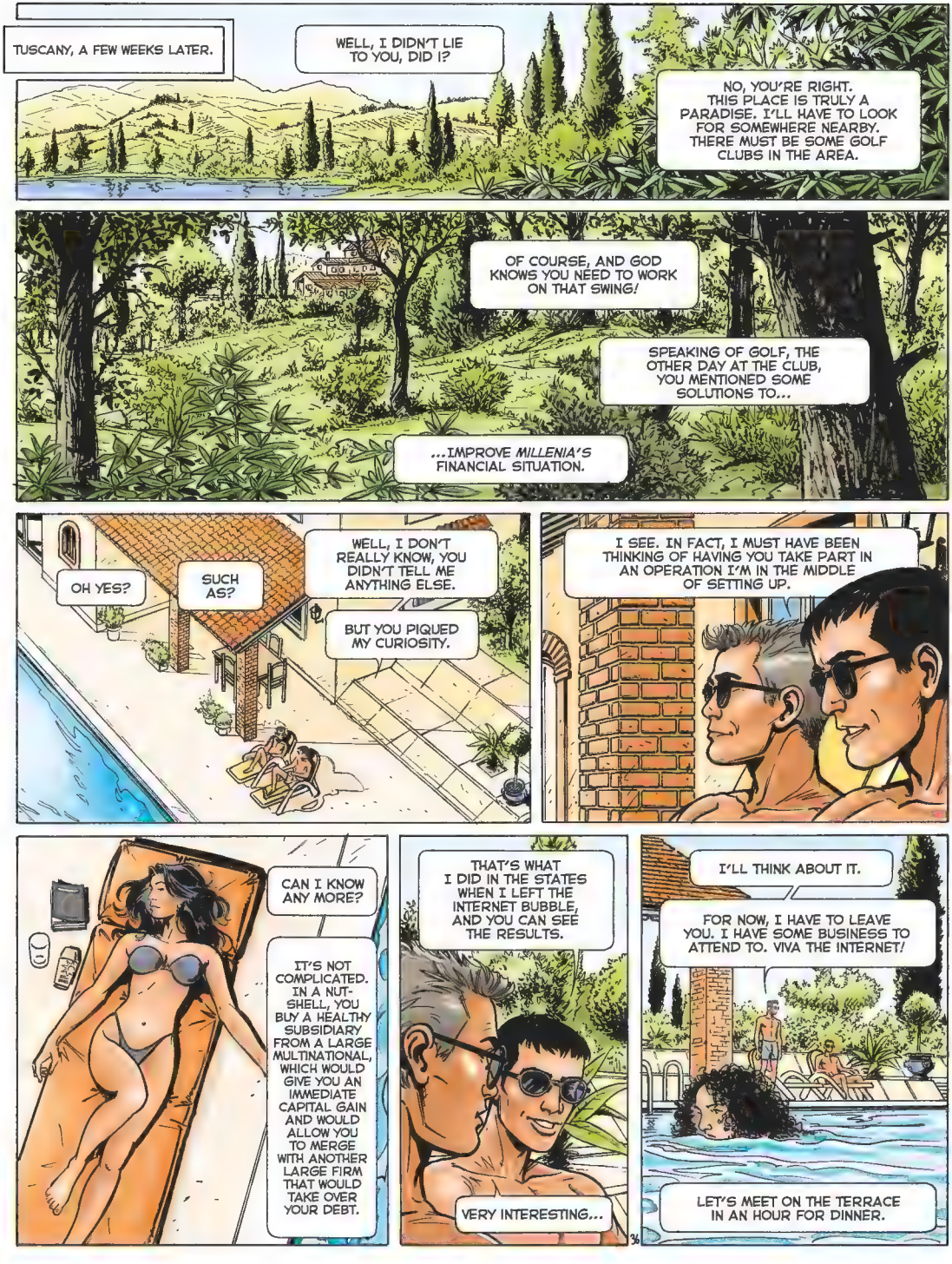

<NO WAY!>
<ILLYA, GO GET HIM FOR ME.>
<HE'S LEAV-ING!>
GO ON, DRIVE!
YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO EXPLAIN WHAT ALL THAT WAS ABOUT.
COME BACK TO MINE FOR A DRINK AND I'LL TELL YOU EVERYTHING.
OKAY.
HERE WE ARE.
YOU'VE REALLY SETTLED IN HERE.
BUT YOUR WIFE...
SHE DOESN'T LIVE HERE.
WE HAVE A HOUSE IN THE SUBURBS.
THIS IS JUST MY PARISIAN PIED-À-TERRE. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DRINK? WHISKY? GIN? VODKA?
ARE YOU TRYING TO KILL ME?!
I PREFER CHAMPAGNE, AND I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO FINISH MY GLASS EARLIER.
AH...
CHAMPAGNE.
IT'S JUST...
...I DON'T THINK I HAVE ANY CHILLED.
BUT WAIT HERE FOR 2 MINUTES AND I'LL GO GET SOME FROM THE LIQUOR STORE ON THE CORNER. IT'S OPEN ALL NIGHT AND ALWAYS HAS SOME IN THE CHILLER.
OKAY, HE'S GONE. WARN ME WHEN HE'S COMING BACK. I ONLY HAVE A FEW MINUTES.

70%
HE'S COMING UP.
HURRY.
IT'S FINE, I'M DONE.
HERE YOU GO! AND NICE AND COLD, AS PROMISED!
WAIT, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I'M REALLY SORRY, THIERRY, BUT I DIDN'T REALIZE THE TIME.
I HAVE A MEETING EARLY TOMORROW MORNING. BUT DON'T WORRY, THIS IS JUST A RAIN CHECK.
BESIDES, WE DON'T WANT TO GET BORED WITH EACH OTHER. GOOD NIGHT.
BUT, SARAH, YOU... YOU CAN'T...

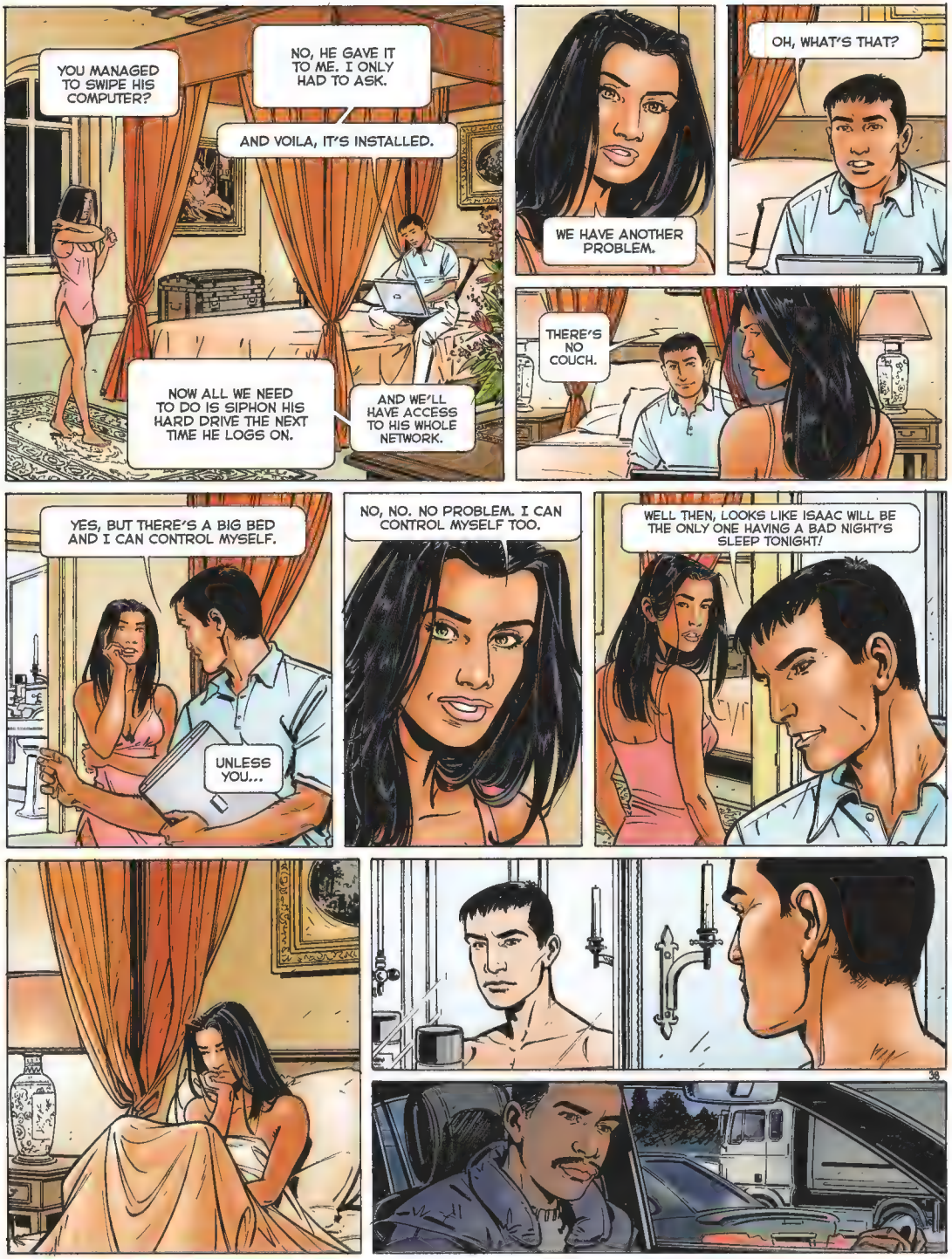

OKAY. NOW THAT WE HAVE FONTAINE'S AND MINEZ'S HARD DRIVES, WE'RE STARTING TO GET A BETTER PICTURE OF HOW THEY WORK.
MINEZ'S PR COMPANY ONLY DOES A VERY SMALL AMOUNT OF BUSINESS. IT'S USED AS A HUB FOR THE TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN BONNEFOND AND THE RUSSIANS WHO PROVIDE WEAPONS FROM THE EX-EASTERN BLOC TO COUNTRIES IN AFRICA.
AND OF COURSE, SYLVIE FONTAINE IS IN CHARGE OF MANIPULATING THE ACCOUNTS SO THAT EVERYTHING APPEARS, OR RATHER DISAPPEARS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW.
TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ACCOUNTS, YOU CAN SEE THAT THERE ARE REGULAR CASH DEPOSITS THAT NEVER TOTALLY CORRESPOND TO THE AMOUNTS AGREED BETWEEN THE RUSSIANS AND BONNEFOND.
IT SEEMS THAT MINEZ ALWAYS KEEPS SLIGHTLY MORE THAN HIS SHARE, RIPPING OFF BOTH THE RUSSIANS AND BONNEFOND. HE'S PLAYING A VERY DANGEROUS GAME. THE RUSSIAN MAFIA ARE VERY TOUCHY WHEN THEIR MONEY'S INVOLVED.
IT LOOKS LIKE THE LIFE HE'S LEADING IS GONNA COST HIM DEARLY! THE NIGHTCLUBS, THE GAMBLING, WHERE HE'S NOT EXACTLY SUCCESSFUL, THE ORGIES, ALL WITH A GENEROUS SPRINKLING OF COKE.
A REAL CLICHÉD LIFE OF DEBAUCHERY.
THE KINKIEST BEING THESE PHOTOS FROM THE S&M NIGHTS HE REGULARLY ATTENDS WITH FONTAINE, WHICH HE KEEPS ON HIS HARD DRIVE AS SOUVENIRS.
AND THERE ARE ALL THESE RECENT EMAILS HE'S BEEN EXCHANGING WITH ANOTHER WOMAN, HIS CURRENT MISTRESS BY ALL ACCOUNTS, WHOSE NAME WE DON'T YET KNOW. SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO BE DISCREET...
AS FOR SAINT-HUBERT, HE'S MUCH MORE PRUDENT AND DOESN'T PUT EVERYTHING ON HIS HARD DRIVE. HE'S ALWAYS EVASIVE WHEN HE TALKS.
capacity for analysis, the disappearance of respite, codes to memorize
HIS LINKS WITH CHARLES DE SALERS AND HIS EXTREME RIGHT-WING PARTY, NATION FRANÇAISE, ARE STILL RATHER OBSCURE. OFFICIALLY, THERE'S NO LINK BETWEEN THE TWO MEN, AND YET...
ALL WE NEED TO DO NOW IS HACK BONNEFOND'S HARD DRIVE TO GET THE LAST PIECE OF THE PUZZLE...
...AND DESTROY HIM.

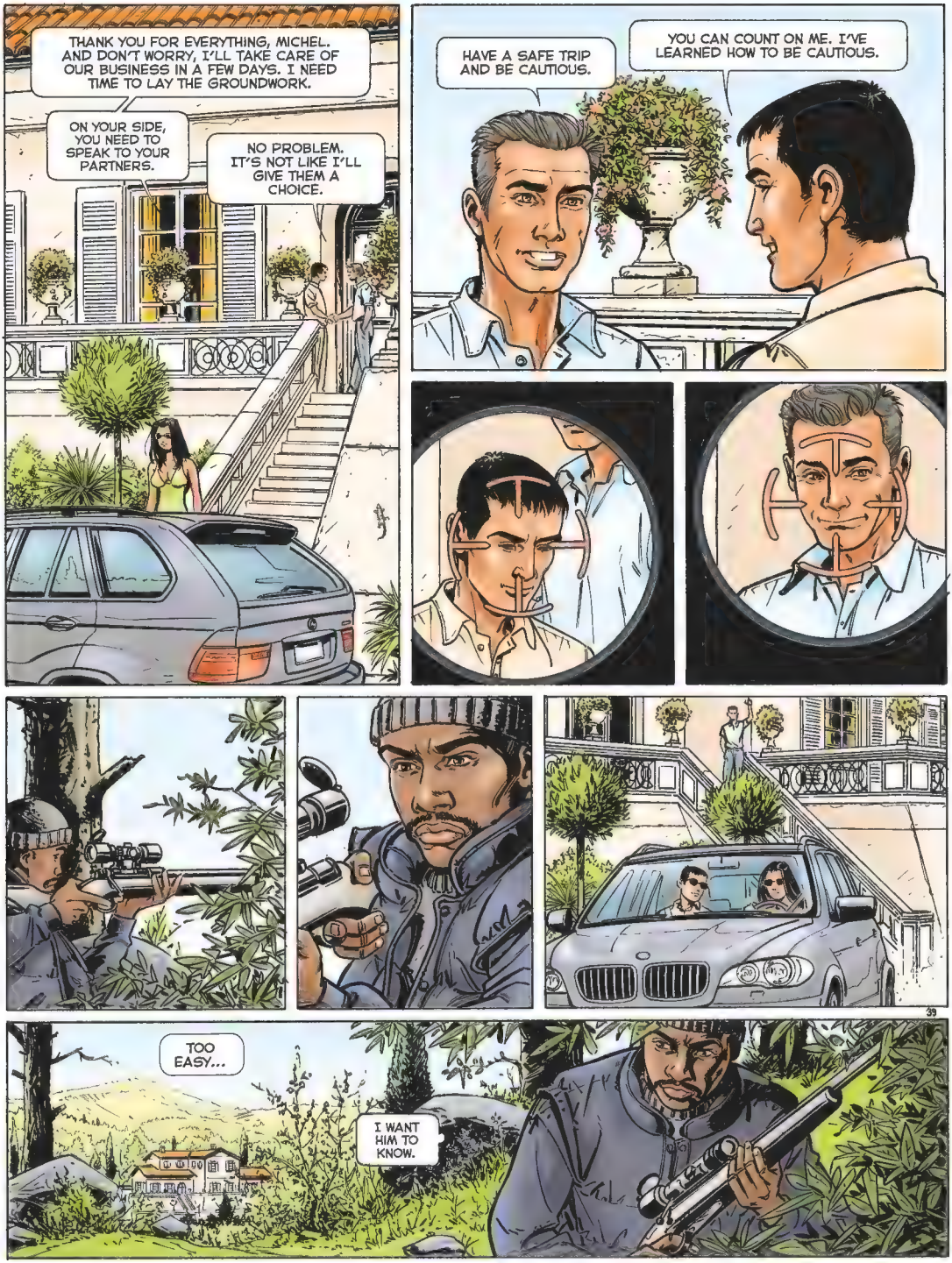

LUCIE! THE EDITORIAL MEETING IS ABOUT TO START!
ECHOSPHERE
WHAT ARE YOU STILL DOING HERE, MY DEAR?
EVERYONE'S WAITING FOR YOU IN THE MEETING ROOM!
ROGER? BUT THE MEETING DOESN'T START UNTIL 5.
IT IS 5. I BET YOU DIDN'T EVEN GO FOR LUNCH.
WHAT'S UP WITH YOU?
WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON? DON'T TELL ME IT'S STILL THAT DANTES STORY...
IT IS.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE DID TO YOU, OR RATHER I ONLY KNOW TOO WELL, BUT YOU'RE GOING TO DO ME A FAVOR AND DROP ALL THAT AND COME WITH ME.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. I'M SURE I'M GOING TO SCREW UP MY PROFILE. HE ANSWERED ALL MY QUESTIONS, BUT THE GUY SEEMS TOO SMOOTH, TOO PERFECT.
TOO MUCH LIGHT IN ORDER TO HIDE THE SHADOWY AREAS.
AND THE WAY HE LOOKS AT ME. I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE EXPECTS FROM ME.
IN ANY EVENT, I KNOW WHAT YOU EXPECT FROM HIM...

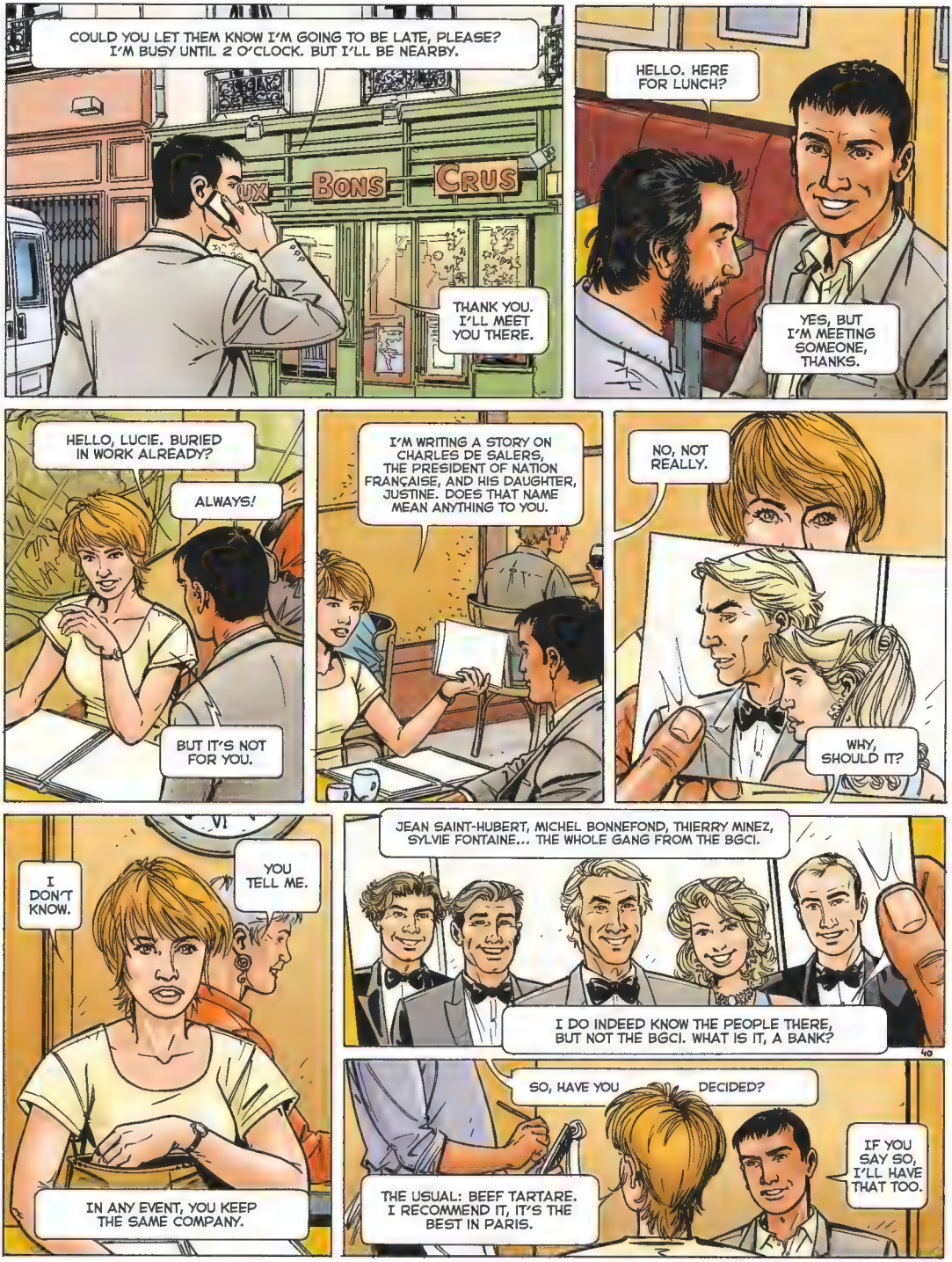

NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEAN.
I OBVIOUSLY VERIFIED EVERYTHING HE TOLD ME, AND IT ALL CHECKS OUT.
BUT I HAVE THE FEELING I'M MISSING THE BIGGEST PIECE OF THE PUZZLE.
OKAY, YOU KNOW WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO, I'M GOING TO TAKE OVER THIS WITH YOU.
I KNOW WE CAN TRUST YOUR INTUITION, BUT WE HAVE OTHER FISH TO FRY. WE'RE WRAPPING UP, OKAY?
THIS DANTES REALLY APPEARED LIKE THE MESSIAH BEFORE THE APOSTLES!
THE APOSTLES!
THAT'S IT!
ROGER, YOU'RE A GENIUS!
WHERE DID I PUT IT?!
HE'S THE ONE WHO INTRODUCED HIMSELF TO THEM, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.
AND THAT CAN'T BE A COINCIDENCE.

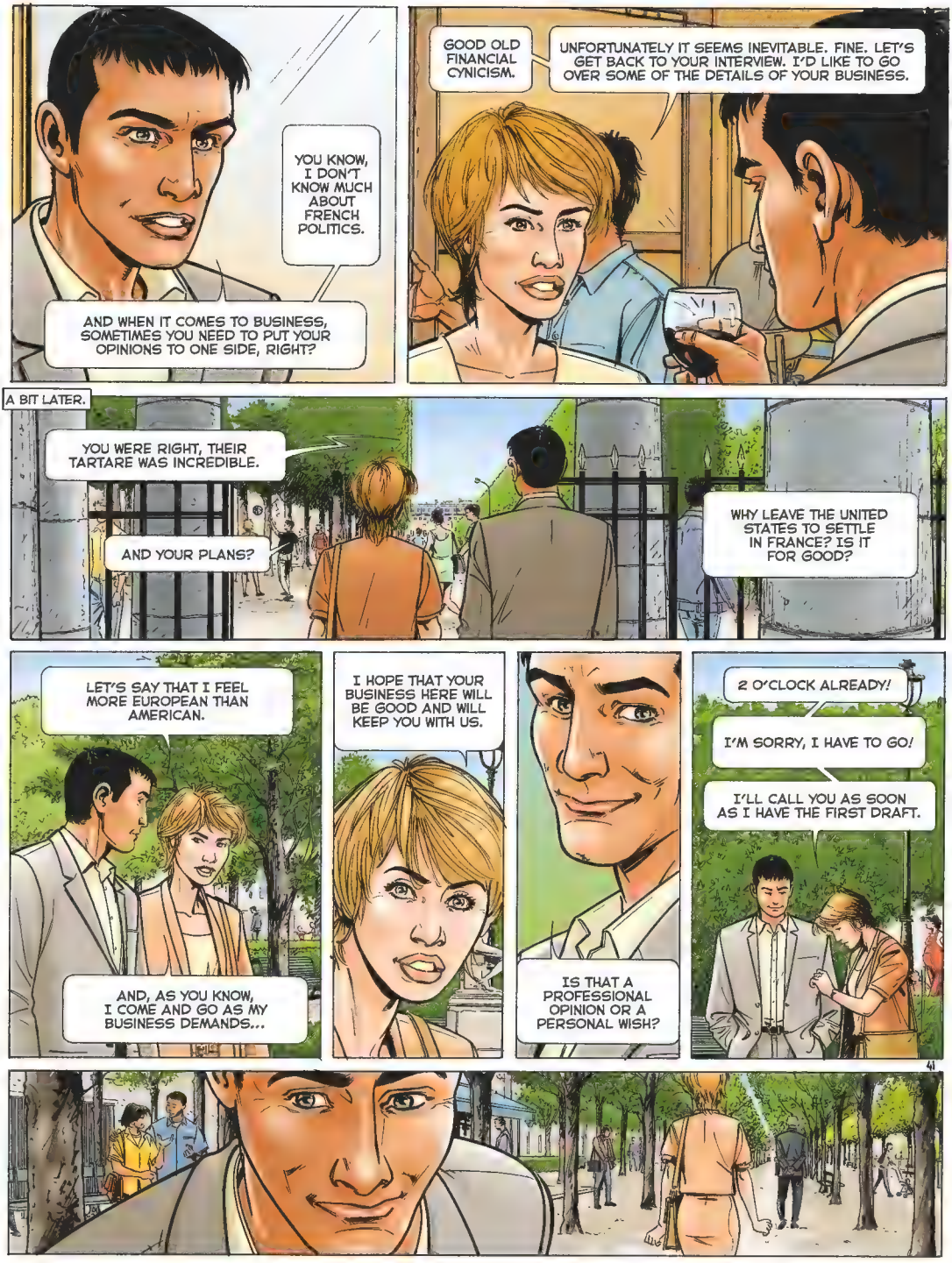

TUSCANY, A FEW WEEKS LATER.
WELL, I DIDN'T LIE TO YOU, DID I?
NO, YOU'RE RIGHT. THIS PLACE IS TRULY A PARADISE. I'LL HAVE TO LOOK FOR SOMEWHERE NEARBY. THERE MUST BE SOME GOLF CLUBS IN THE AREA.
OF COURSE, AND GOD KNOWS YOU NEED TO WORK ON THAT SWING!
SPEAKING OF GOLF, THE OTHER DAY AT THE CLUB, YOU MENTIONED SOME SOLUTIONS TO...
...IMPROVE MILLENIA'S FINANCIAL SITUATION.
OH YES?
SUCH AS?
WELL, I DON'T REALLY KNOW, YOU DIDN'T TELL ME ANYTHING ELSE.
BUT YOU PIQUED MY CURIOSITY.
I SEE. IN FACT, I MUST HAVE BEEN THINKING OF HAVING YOU TAKE PART IN AN OPERATION I'M IN THE MIDDLE OF SETTING UP.
CAN I KNOW ANY MORE?
IT'S NOT COMPLICATED. IN A NUT-SHELL, YOU BUY A HEALTHY SUBSIDIARY FROM A LARGE MULTINATIONAL, WHICH WOULD GIVE YOU AN IMMEDIATE CAPITAL GAIN AND WOULD ALLOW YOU TO MERGE WITH ANOTHER LARGE FIRM THAT WOULD TAKE OVER YOUR DEBT.
THAT'S WHAT I DID IN THE STATES WHEN I LEFT THE INTERNET BUBBLE, AND YOU CAN SEE THE RESULTS.
VERY INTERESTING...
I'LL THINK ABOUT IT.
FOR NOW, I HAVE TO LEAVE YOU. I HAVE SOME BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO. VIVA THE INTERNET!
LET'S MEET ON THE TERRACE IN AN HOUR FOR DINNER.

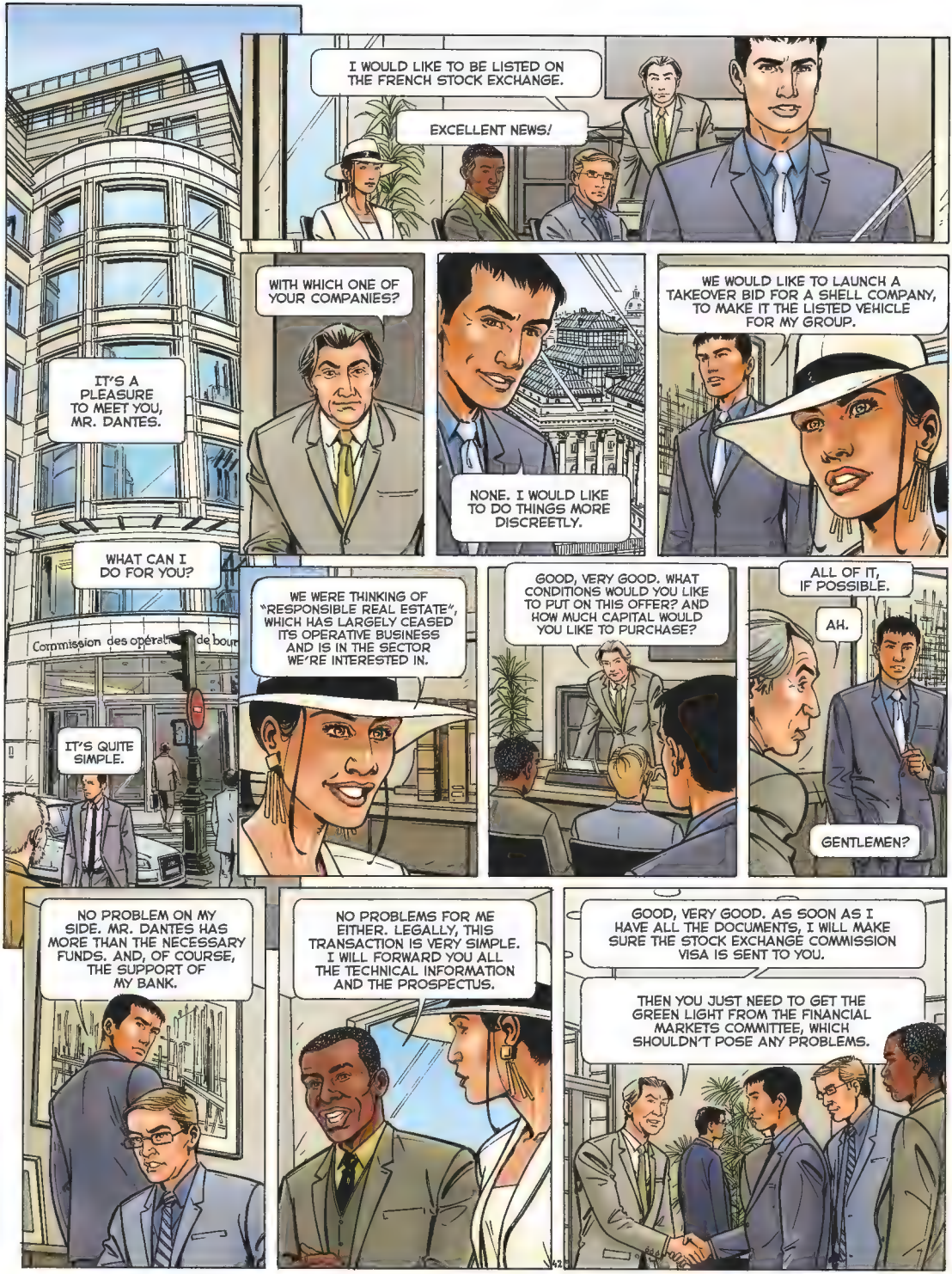
AND CHRISTOPHER TELLS ME YOU WORK TOO, SARAH.
YES, I DO SOME CONSULTING FOR AMERICAN FIRMS. MAINLY ON SPONSORSHIPS.
I TOLD YOU, MICHEL, SARAH'S THE PERFECT WOMAN. BEAUTIFUL, INTELLIGENT, EDUCATED, AND FUNNY. ALMOST TOO PERFECT, ACTUALLY.
WELL, I'M GOING TO BED.
ME TOO, ALL THIS SUN HAS KNOCKED ME OUT AND I WANT TO FINISH MY BOOK.
WERE YOU REALLY SERIOUS WHEN YOU MADE THAT OFFER THIS MORNING, BY THE POOL?
I COULDN'T BE MORE SERIOUS.
AND I CAN ASSURE YOU THERE'S NO RISK.
WELL, IN THAT CASE, I'M YOUR MAN.
I'M ALREADY OVERJOYED AT THE PROSPECT OF CLEANING UP *MILLENIA*'S FINANCES AND NOT LIVING WITH THE PRESSURE OF THOSE BANKING VULTURES!
OH WAIT, I'VE FORGOTTEN MY LAPTOP. COULD I BORROW YOURS, JUST TO CHECK MY EMAIL?
OF COURSE, NO PROBLEM.
I'LL SET UP A GUEST LOGIN THAT YOU CAN DELETE AFTERWARD. THAT WAY NOBODY WILL SEE YOUR LITTLE SECRETS.

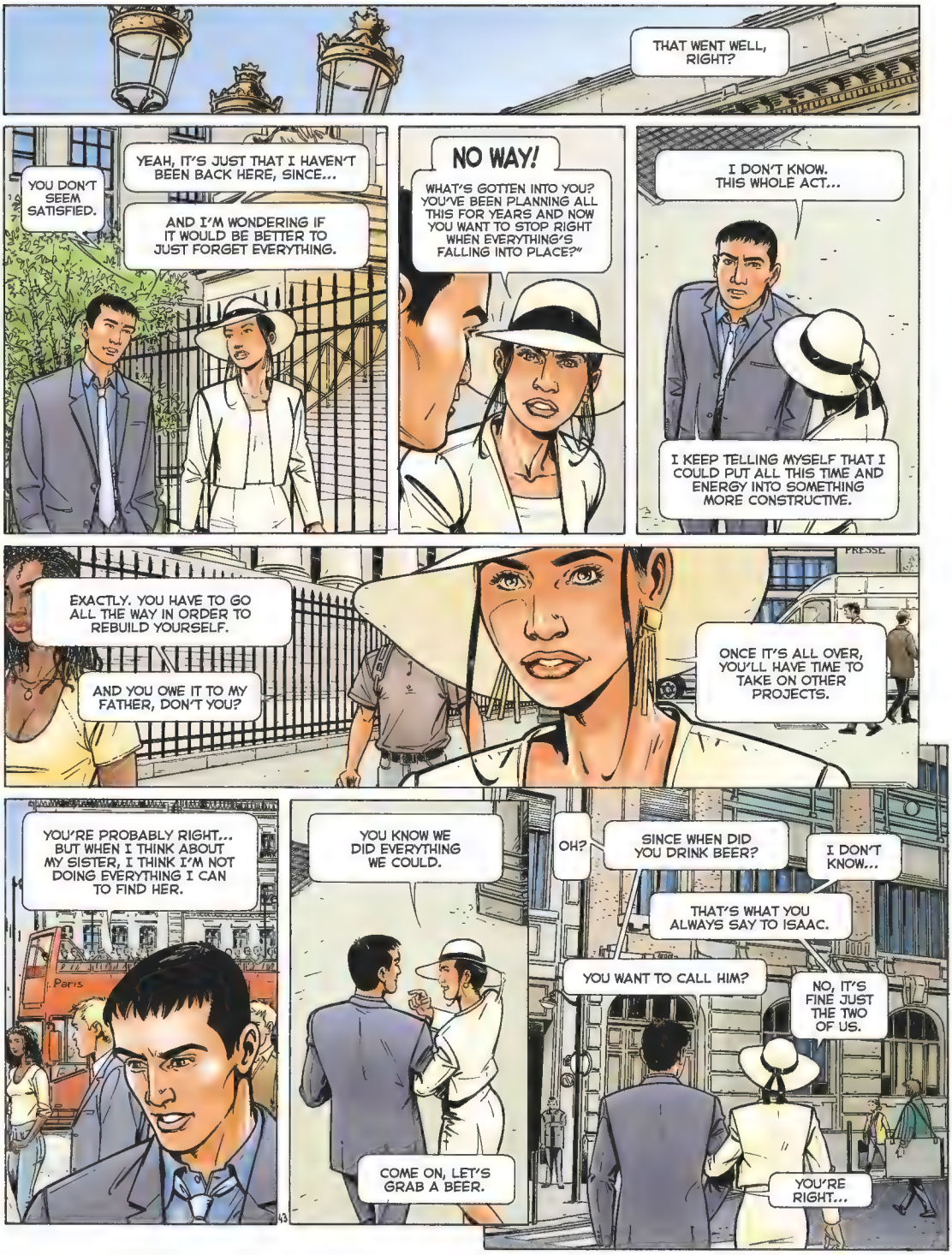

YOU MANAGED TO SWIPE HIS COMPUTER?
NO, HE GAVE IT TO ME. I ONLY HAD TO ASK.
AND VOILA, IT'S INSTALLED.
NOW ALL WE NEED TO DO IS SIPHON HIS HARD DRIVE THE NEXT TIME HE LOGS ON.
AND WE'LL HAVE ACCESS TO HIS WHOLE NETWORK.
WE HAVE ANOTHER PROBLEM.
OH, WHAT'S THAT?
THERE'S NO COUCH.
YES, BUT THERE'S A BIG BED AND I CAN CONTROL MYSELF.
UNLESS YOU...
NO, NO. NO PROBLEM. I CAN CONTROL MYSELF TOO.
WELL THEN, LOOKS LIKE ISAAC WILL BE THE ONLY ONE HAVING A BAD NIGHT'S SLEEP TONIGHT!
38

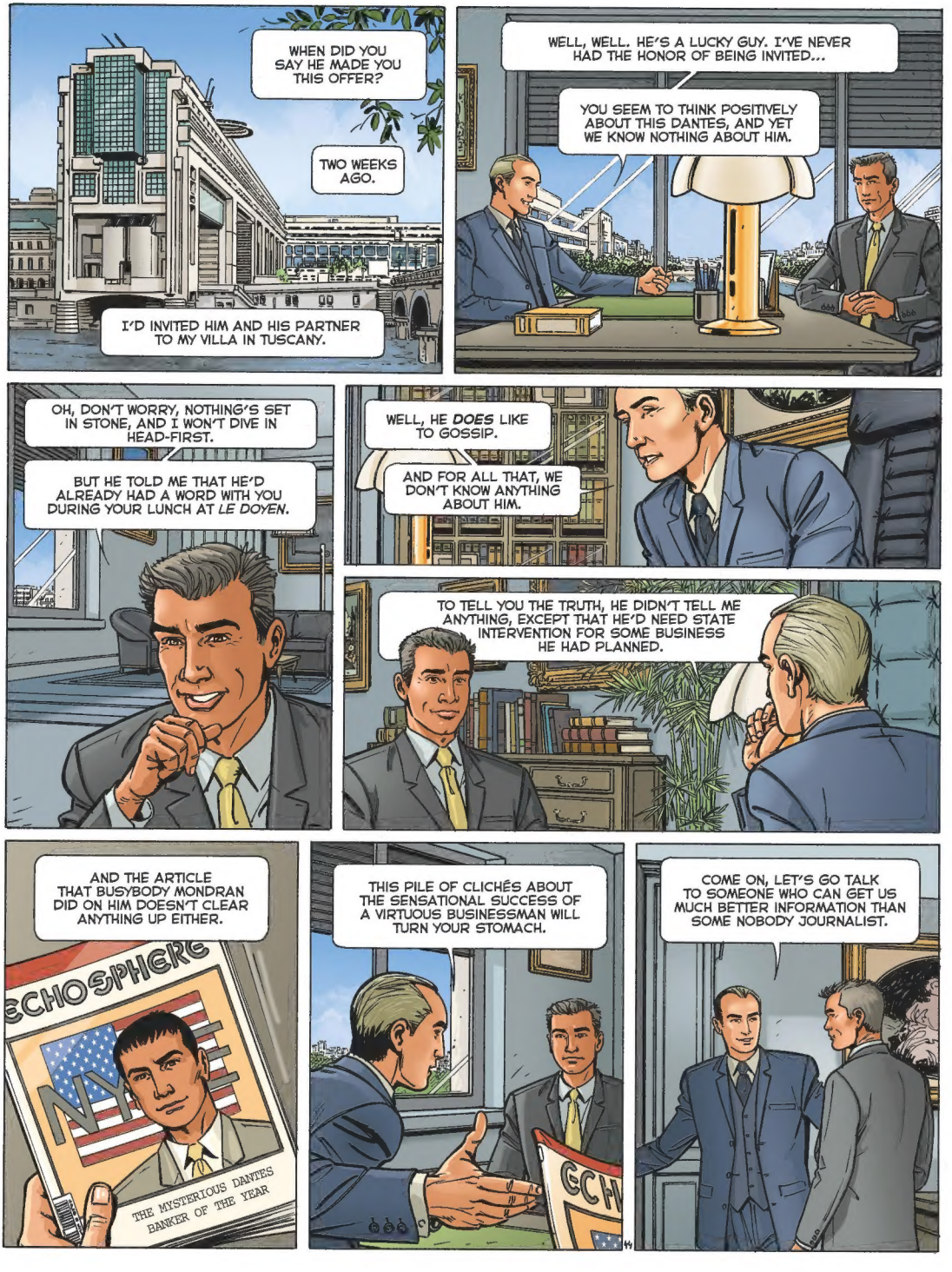

THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING, MICHEL. AND DON'T WORRY, I'LL TAKE CARE OF OUR BUSINESS IN A FEW DAYS. I NEED TIME TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK.
ON YOUR SIDE, YOU NEED TO SPEAK TO YOUR PARTNERS.
NO PROBLEM. IT'S NOT LIKE I'LL GIVE THEM A CHOICE.
HAVE A SAFE TRIP AND BE CAUTIOUS.
YOU CAN COUNT ON ME. I'VE LEARNED HOW TO BE CAUTIOUS.
39
TOO EASY...
I WANT HIM TO KNOW.


COULD YOU LET THEM KNOW I'M GOING TO BE LATE, PLEASE? I'M BUSY UNTIL 2 O'CLOCK. BUT I'LL BE NEARBY.
BONS
CRUS
THANK YOU. I'LL MEET YOU THERE.
HELLO. HERE FOR LUNCH?
YES, BUT I'M MEETING SOMEONE, THANKS.
HELLO, LUCIE. BURIED IN WORK ALREADY?
ALWAYS!
BUT IT'S NOT FOR YOU.
I'M WRITING A STORY ON CHARLES DE SALERS, THE PRESIDENT OF NATION FRANÇAISE, AND HIS DAUGHTER, JUSTINE. DOES THAT NAME MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU.
NO, NOT REALLY.
WHY, SHOULD IT?
I DON'T KNOW.
YOU TELL ME.
IN ANY EVENT, YOU KEEP THE SAME COMPANY.
JEAN SAINT-HUBERT, MICHEL BONNEFOND, THIERRY MINEZ, SYLVIE FONTAINE... THE WHOLE GANG FROM THE BGCI.
I DO INDEED KNOW THE PEOPLE THERE, BUT NOT THE BGCI. WHAT IS IT, A BANK?
40
SO, HAVE YOU DECIDED?
IF YOU SAY SO, I'LL HAVE THAT TOO.
THE USUAL: BEEF TARTARE. I RECOMMEND IT, IT'S THE BEST IN PARIS.

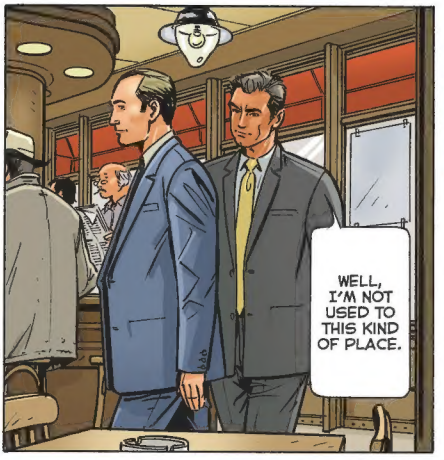

YOU KNOW, I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT FRENCH POLITICS.
AND WHEN IT COMES TO BUSINESS, SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO PUT YOUR OPINIONS TO ONE SIDE, RIGHT?
GOOD OLD FINANCIAL CYNICISM.
UNFORTUNATELY IT SEEMS INEVITABLE. FINE. LET'S GET BACK TO YOUR INTERVIEW. I'D LIKE TO GO OVER SOME OF THE DETAILS OF YOUR BUSINESS.
A BIT LATER.
YOU WERE RIGHT, THEIR TARTARE WAS INCREDIBLE.
AND YOUR PLANS?
WHY LEAVE THE UNITED STATES TO SETTLE IN FRANCE? IS IT FOR GOOD?
LET'S SAY THAT I FEEL MORE EUROPEAN THAN AMERICAN.
AND, AS YOU KNOW, I COME AND GO AS MY BUSINESS DEMANDS...
I HOPE THAT YOUR BUSINESS HERE WILL BE GOOD AND WILL KEEP YOU WITH US.
IS THAT A PROFESSIONAL OPINION OR A PERSONAL WISH?
2 O'CLOCK ALREADY!
I'M SORRY, I HAVE TO GO!
I'LL CALL YOU AS SOON AS I HAVE THE FIRST DRAFT.
41


I WOULD LIKE TO BE LISTED ON THE FRENCH STOCK EXCHANGE.
EXCELLENT NEWS!
WITH WHICH ONE OF YOUR COMPANIES?
NONE. I WOULD LIKE TO DO THINGS MORE DISCREETLY.
WE WOULD LIKE TO LAUNCH A TAKEOVER BID FOR A SHELL COMPANY, TO MAKE IT THE LISTED VEHICLE FOR MY GROUP.
IT'S A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, MR. DANTES.
WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
Commission des opérat de bour
IT'S QUITE SIMPLE.
WE WERE THINKING OF "RESPONSIBLE REAL ESTATE", WHICH HAS LARGELY CEASED ITS OPERATIVE BUSINESS AND IS IN THE SECTOR WE'RE INTERESTED IN.
GOOD, VERY GOOD. WHAT CONDITIONS WOULD YOU LIKE TO PUT ON THIS OFFER? AND HOW MUCH CAPITAL WOULD YOU LIKE TO PURCHASE?
ALL OF IT, IF POSSIBLE.
AH.
GENTLEMEN?
NO PROBLEM ON MY SIDE. MR. DANTES HAS MORE THAN THE NECESSARY FUNDS. AND, OF COURSE, THE SUPPORT OF MY BANK.
NO PROBLEMS FOR ME EITHER. LEGALLY, THIS TRANSACTION IS VERY SIMPLE. I WILL FORWARD YOU ALL THE TECHNICAL INFORMATION AND THE PROSPECTUS.
GOOD, VERY GOOD. AS SOON AS I HAVE ALL THE DOCUMENTS, I WILL MAKE SURE THE STOCK EXCHANGE COMMISSION VISA IS SENT TO YOU.
THEN YOU JUST NEED TO GET THE GREEN LIGHT FROM THE FINANCIAL MARKETS COMMITTEE, WHICH SHOULDN'T POSE ANY PROBLEMS.
42


THAT WENT WELL, RIGHT?
YOU DON'T SEEM SATISFIED.
YEAH, IT'S JUST THAT I HAVEN'T BEEN BACK HERE, SINCE...
AND I'M WONDERING IF IT WOULD BE BETTER TO JUST FORGET EVERYTHING.
NO WAY!
WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU? YOU'VE BEEN PLANNING ALL THIS FOR YEARS AND NOW YOU WANT TO STOP RIGHT WHEN EVERYTHING'S FALLING INTO PLACE?"
I DON'T KNOW. THIS WHOLE ACT...
I KEEP TELLING MYSELF THAT I COULD PUT ALL THIS TIME AND ENERGY INTO SOMETHING MORE CONSTRUCTIVE.
EXACTLY. YOU HAVE TO GO ALL THE WAY IN ORDER TO REBUILD YOURSELF.
AND YOU OWE IT TO MY FATHER, DON'T YOU?
ONCE IT'S ALL OVER, YOU'LL HAVE TIME TO TAKE ON OTHER PROJECTS.
PRESSE
YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT... BUT WHEN I THINK ABOUT MY SISTER, I THINK I'M NOT DOING EVERYTHING I CAN TO FIND HER.
Paris
43
YOU KNOW WE DID EVERYTHING WE COULD.
COME ON, LET'S GRAB A BEER.
OH?
SINCE WHEN DID YOU DRINK BEER?
I DON'T KNOW...
THAT'S WHAT YOU ALWAYS SAY TO ISAAC.
YOU WANT TO CALL HIM?
NO, IT'S FINE JUST THE TWO OF US.
YOU'RE RIGHT...


WHEN DID YOU SAY HE MADE YOU THIS OFFER?
TWO WEEKS AGO.
I'D INVITED HIM AND HIS PARTNER TO MY VILLA IN TUSCANY.
WELL, WELL. HE'S A LUCKY GUY. I'VE NEVER HAD THE HONOR OF BEING INVITED...
YOU SEEM TO THINK POSITIVELY ABOUT THIS DANTES, AND YET WE KNOW NOTHING ABOUT HIM.
OH, DON'T WORRY, NOTHING'S SET IN STONE, AND I WON'T DIVE IN HEAD-FIRST.
BUT HE TOLD ME THAT HE'D ALREADY HAD A WORD WITH YOU DURING YOUR LUNCH AT *LE DOYEN*.
WELL, HE ***DOES*** LIKE TO GOSSIP.
AND FOR ALL THAT, WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIM.
TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, HE DIDN'T TELL ME ANYTHING, EXCEPT THAT HE'D NEED STATE INTERVENTION FOR SOME BUSINESS HE HAD PLANNED.
AND THE ARTICLE THAT BUSYBODY MONDRAN DID ON HIM DOESN'T CLEAR ANYTHING UP EITHER.
ECHOSPHERE
NY
THE MYSTERIOUS DANTES BANKER OF THE YEAR
THIS PILE OF CLICHÉS ABOUT THE SENSATIONAL SUCCESS OF A VIRTUOUS BUSINESSMAN WILL TURN YOUR STOMACH.
ECH
COME ON, LET'S GO TALK TO SOMEONE WHO CAN GET US MUCH BETTER INFORMATION THAN SOME NOBODY JOURNALIST.

CAFÉ LA FOUDRE

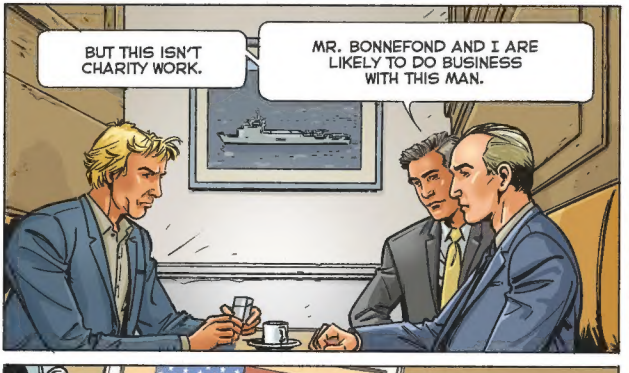

WELL, I'M NOT USED TO THIS KIND OF PLACE.

HERE HE IS.

HELLO, SIR.
IT'S FINE, LUCAS. HAVE A SEAT.

YOU'VE SEEN EACH OTHER BEFORE AT MEETINGS, HAVEN'T YOU?
YES. YOU'RE ONE OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEN.

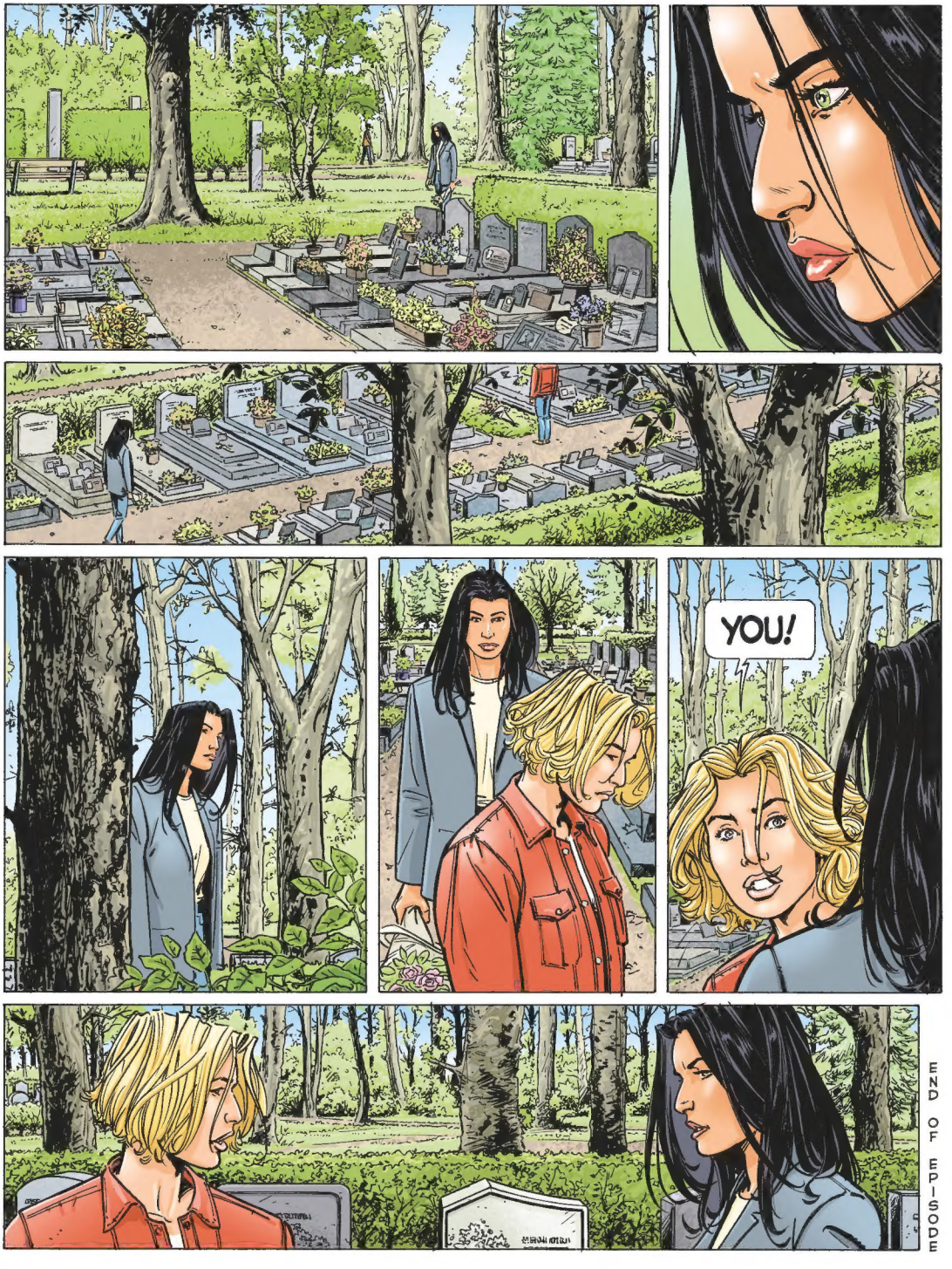
LET'S JUST SAY THAT I DO THE ODD FAVOR FOR THE PARTY AND ITS MEMBERS.


BUT THIS ISN'T CHARITY WORK.
MR. BONNEFOND AND I ARE LIKELY TO DO BUSINESS WITH THIS MAN.

NY
AND YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW A BIT MORE ABOUT HIM, IS THAT RIGHT?

EXACTLY.
WE WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING: WHERE HE GOES, WHERE HE SLEEPS AND WITH WHOM, WHERE HE EATS, AND SO ON.
I WANT A COMPLETE FILE ON HIM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
I HAVE TO PLAY GOLF WITH HIM TOMORROW. YOU CAN FOLLOW HIM FROM THERE.

45



END OF EPISODE

To Alain Martel for his sage advice and his insightful edits on stock market mechanisms.
To my generous friends at "Bulles de Mantes."

PhG

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